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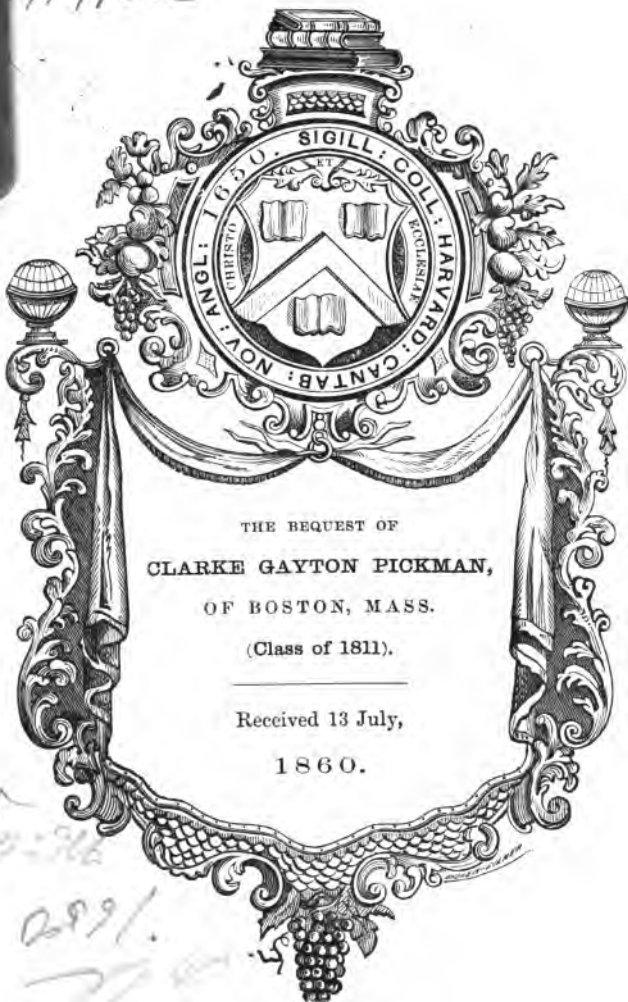
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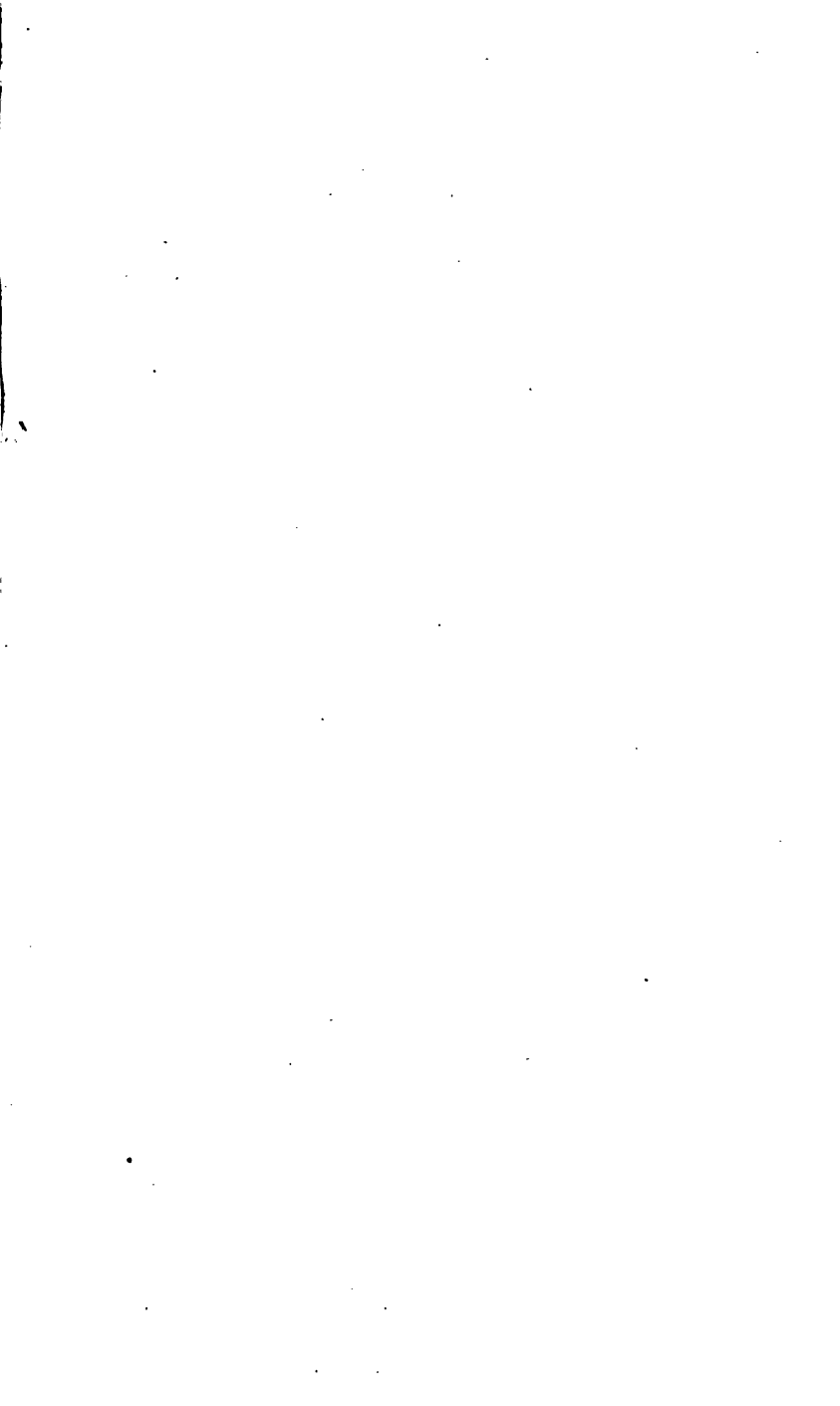


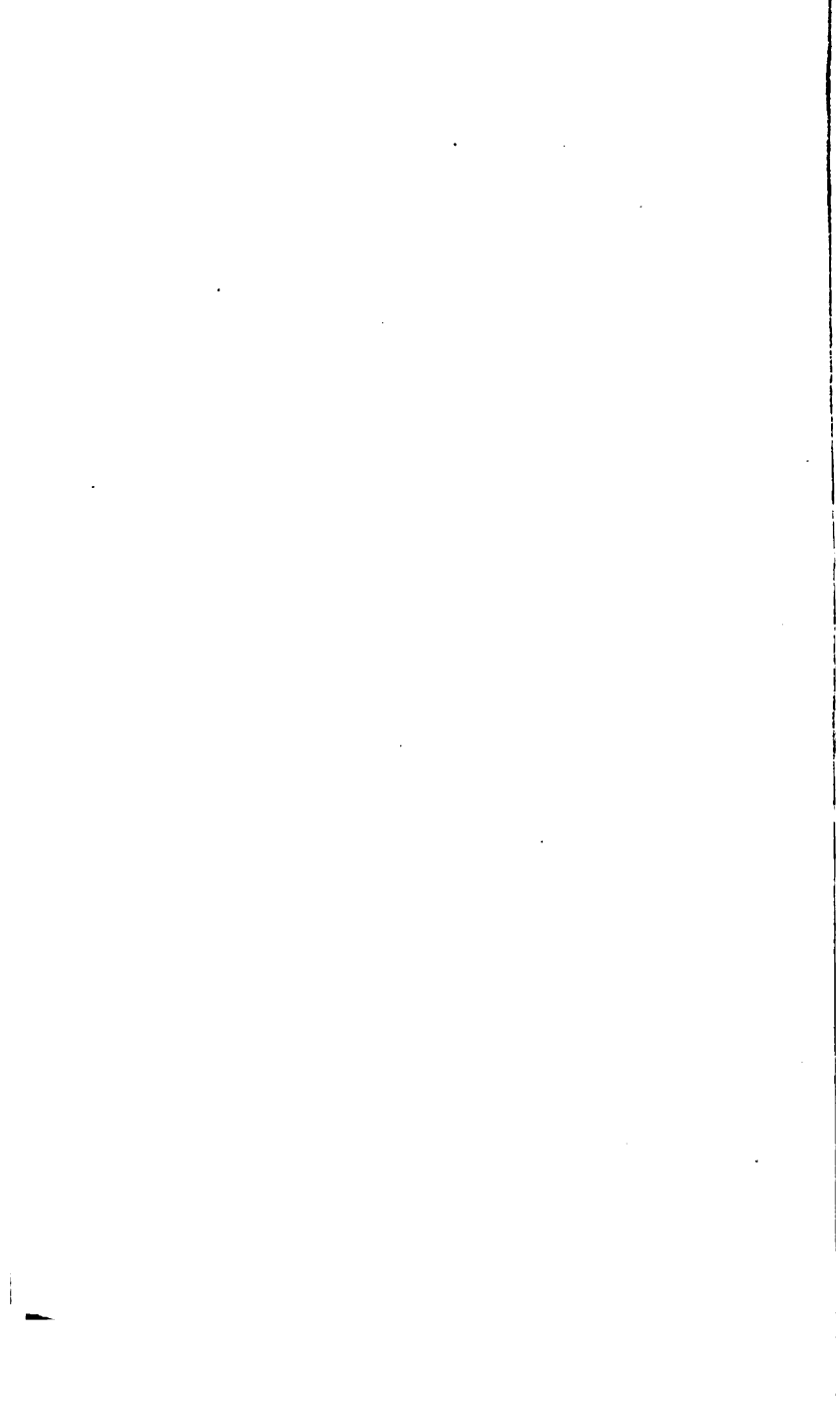
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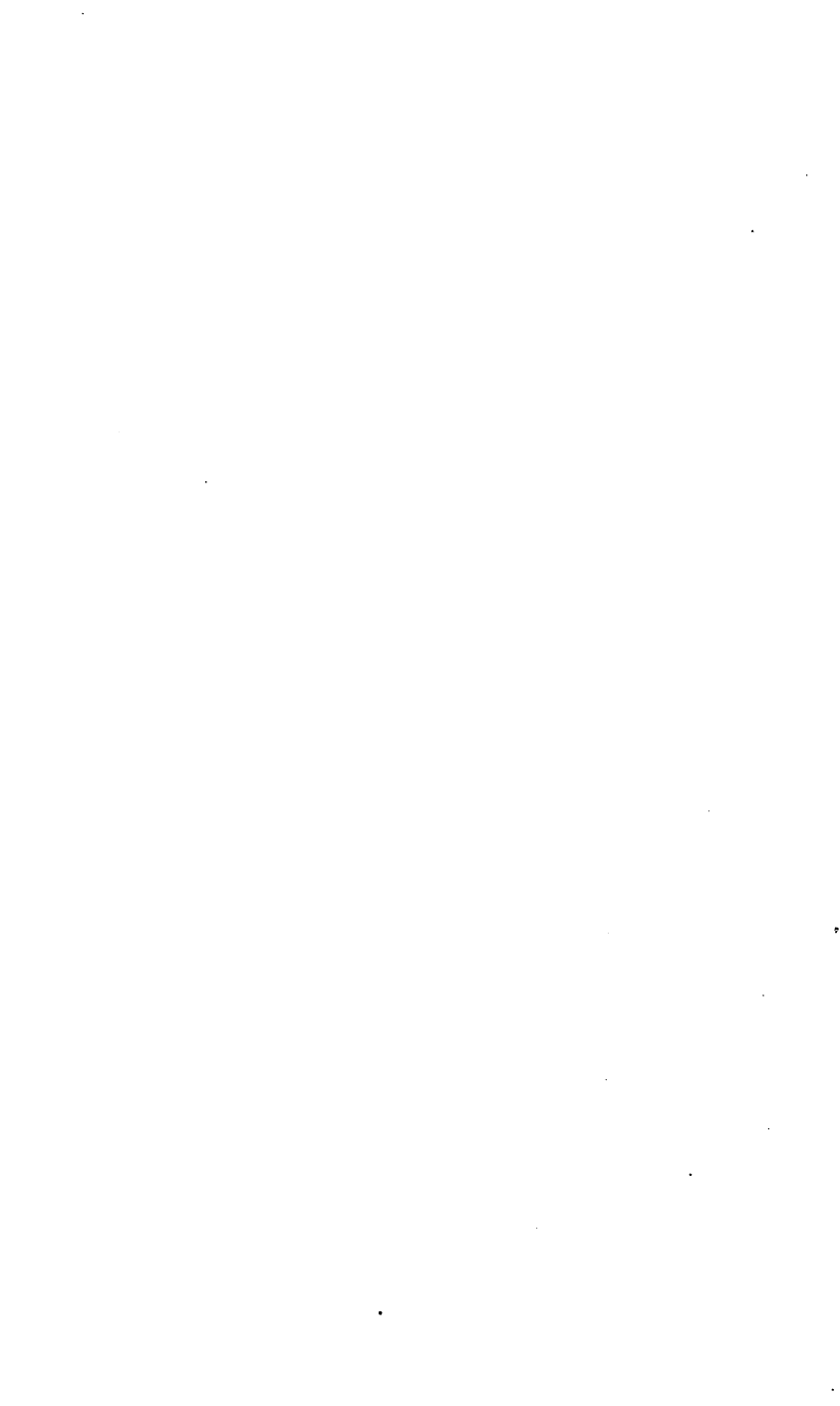
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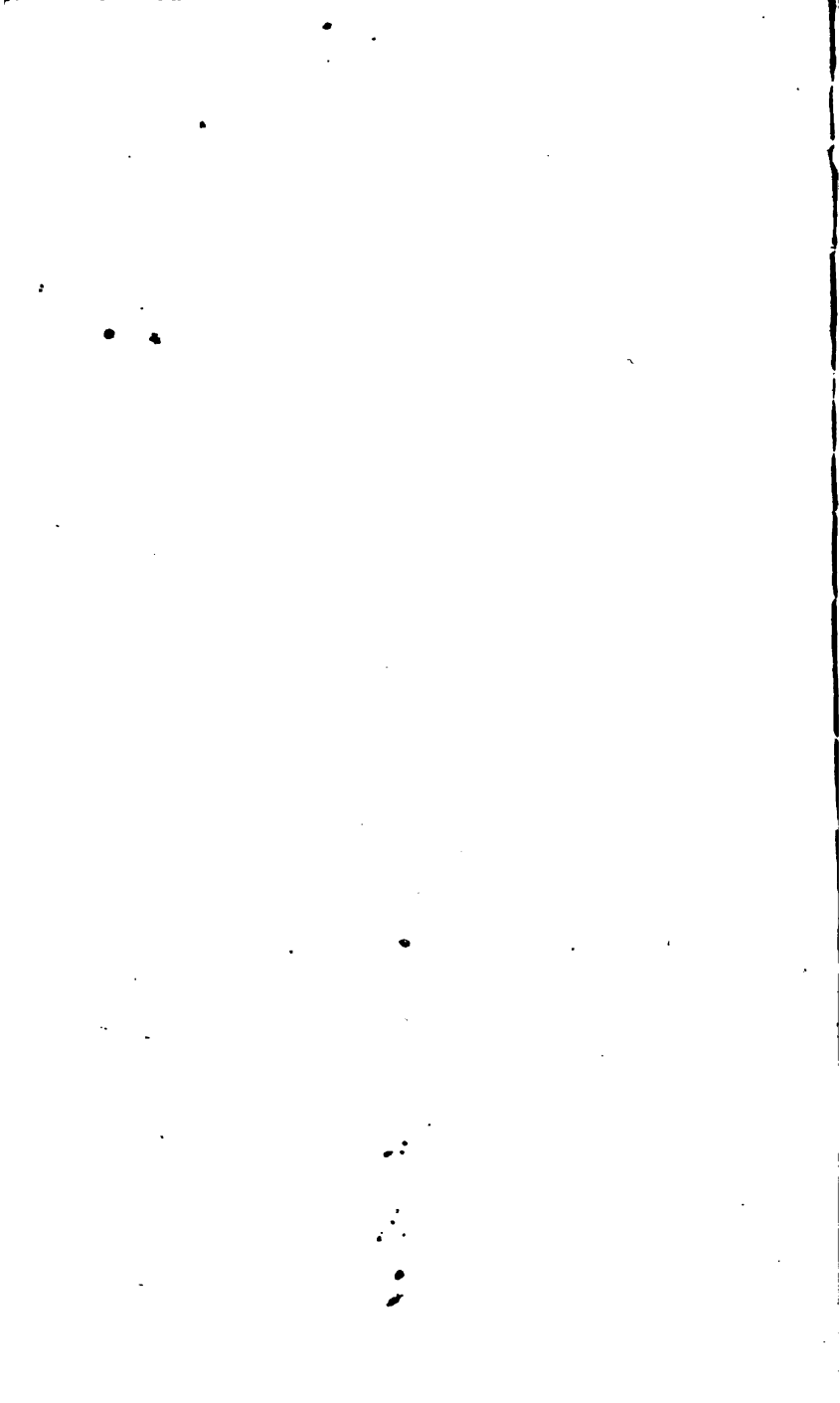
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V A L E R I U S;

ROMAN STORY.

They'll sit by the fire, and presume to know what's done i' the Capitol!
SHAKESPEARE.

By John Gilson Lockhart.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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VALERIUS.

CHAPTER I.

SINCE you are desirous, my friends, that I should relate to you, at length and in order, the things which happened to me during my journey to Rome in the time of Trajan, —notwithstanding the pain which it must cost me to throw myself back once more into many of the feelings of that eventful time, —I cannot refuse to comply with a request, the motive of which, I doubt not, is as laudable as its expression is earnest. I am now an old man, and have lived for threescore years in a remote province of an empire, happy, for the most part, in the protection of enlightened, just, and benevolent princes ; yet I remember, far more accurately than things which occurred only a few months ago, the minutest particulars of what I saw and heard while I sojourned—a young man, and more than half a stranger—among the luxuries and cruelties of the capital of the world, as yet very imperfectly recovered from the effects of the flagitious tyranny of the last of the Flavii. You will not wonder, after you shall have heard my story, that I should be able to speak so distinctly about circumstances so remote ; for none of you, even now, my young friends, need to be informed, that out of some of those circumstances the main threads of my earthly destiny were evolved. To that period I refer the commencement of a connection, which long formed the principal felicity of my domestic life ; and if, in my conduct through the years either of business or of repose, I have exemplified any principles worthy of your adoption or imitation, for this also my gratitude is due to

the not lightly purchased experience of the same now distant period.

My father, as you all have heard, had come with his legion into this island, and married a lady of British blood, some years before the first arrival of the great Agricola.

In the wars of that illustrious commander, during the reigns of Vespasian and Titus, he had the good fortune to find many opportunities of distinguishing himself; but when his general was recalled to the capital by the mean jealousy of Domitian he retired from public life, and determined to spend the remainder of his days in peace, on the lands which belonged to him (chiefly in right of his wife) here in Britain. He laid the foundations of the house in which I have now the pleasure of receiving you; and here, in the cultivation of his fields and in the superintendence of my education, he found abundant employment for the energies of a very active, though by no means an ambitious mind. Early in the reign of Trajan, he died, after being confined to his apartment for a few days by an illness which neither my mother nor myself considered as seriously dangerous, till the very evening of its termination. Our grief knew at first no bounds; and well might it be so, for never did either Roman or British dwelling lament the departure of a more generous, kind, and affectionate master. My mother, who, in wedding him, had offended the greater part of her own kindred, now that he was gone, had no tie to bind her affections to the earth, excepting myself, her only child, who had scarcely yet entered the threshold of manhood. In my society, therefore, her only hope of human comfort resided; while I, on my part, loved her with strong and undivided filial love, of which (however that circumstance may be counterbalanced by other advantages) I have never seen any examples among sons educated at a distance from the unwearied eye of parental affection.

We were not rich—yet we had enough for all our wants; and the melancholy into which my mother gradually declined was not of a nature so severe as to prevent us from spending many hours of innocent happiness beneath the shade of these then younger and greener elms. I look back, even now, with a sad and sorrowful tenderness to the memory of that first summer and more cheerful

winter, which we passed together on this spot after the death of my father. I cannot pretend to regret the accident which immediately afterward separated me from the most gentle of mothers—Alas! never to see her more upon the earth. Yet, how deeply was the happiness of my returning hour stained and imbittered by that sorrowful privation! There was a void in my heart, which it was long before even the fulness of conjugal devotion could entirely fill up and satisfy. In losing her, I had lost the last and strongest link that connected my contemplation of the present with my memory of the past. My early years of infancy and boyhood now existed for nobody but myself; and I could scarcely bear to look back upon them, now that those eyes were closed for ever in whose watchful light all their safety and almost all their happiness had consisted. But I was still young, and had bright hopes before me, that ere long withdrew my attention from the dark places of recollection. It is the common rule of nature, that our parents should precede us to the grave; and it is also her rule, that our grief for them should not be of such power as to prevent us from entering, after they are gone, into a zealous participation both of the business and the pleasures of life. Yet, in all well-regulated spirits, the influence of that necessary and irremediable deprivation, however time may sooth and soften it, has a deep and an enduring resting-place. In the midst of the noisiest, busiest hours of after-life, the memory of that buried tenderness rises up ever and anon to remind us of the instability of all human things, and wins rather than warns us to a deliberate contemplation of futurity. Such is the gentle and abiding effect of that, at first sight, grievous and altogether intolerable affliction. Now, indeed, that every day brings to me some new testimonial of the near approach of my own dissolution, I have begun to regard all these things with another eye, and to find, in the contemplation of my reunion with the dear friends I have lost, a far more than sufficient consolation for the inconvenience occasioned to me by reason of their temporary absence. But it must yet be long ere the course of nature shall bring this last source of happiness near to your eyes, and teach you, as I have of late been taught, how near to each other at times

may be found not only the physical effects but the proximate causes of pleasure and of pain.

One evening towards the end of the winter following the death of my father, I was sitting with my mother in the small room where we breakfasted this morning, when letters were brought to me by a messenger from Venta, which immediately engaged the most anxious consideration of us both. They were all from Rome, and written, for the most part, by members of my father's family resident there, none of whom either my mother or myself had ever seen. It was mentioned in all of them, but most fully and distinctly in that of Caius Licinius, the lawyer (who was near of kin to our house), that by the death of a certain old patrician, Cneius Valerius by name, I had become legally entitled to a very considerable fortune, to claim and take possession of which demanded my immediate presence in the metropolis. My rights, said this jurist, were indeed called in question by another branch of the family, but were I on the spot, his professional exertions, he had no doubt, would be able to gain for me a complete, if not an easy victory. He hinted, at the same time, that whatever private interest he or any of his friends could command should be heartily at my service, for the sake of my father and of my name.

My mother and I endeavoured as well as we could to understand the nature of the case; but the authority of Licinius, of whose character we had always heard great commendation, was sufficient of itself alone to determine us in the end. After ruminating for a long while in silence, my dear mother at last said to me, "Yes, Caius, we must part for a season. You owe it to these kind friends, no less than to your father's memory and your own interest, to make a fair attempt for the recovery of this disputed inheritance. You are young, and have seen no cities, except Venta,* which your father used to call a village; but I trust to your good heart, and your love for me, that if you succeed you will immediately come back to enjoy your wealth here within sight of your mother, and at a distance from those sudden changes to which the great city is from time to time subjected. Take care

* i. e. Venta Belgarum—Winchester.

that you abide in Rome no longer than is absolutely necessary, for fearful reports have reached us of the increasing wickedness of its inhabitants. Despatch your business as speedily as the circumstances may permit, and do not grudge any expense which may enable you more quickly to see the end of it. To-morrow and next day must be spent in preparing you necessities for so long a journey ; but on the third day I wish you to depart, for there is nothing more pernicious than delay in matters of importance ; and besides, my son, the sooner you go the sooner may I look for your return. And now, since I know you are to depart, my dear Caius, it would be but a trifling consolation for me to keep you a few days more lingering here. You will take the faithful Boto with you, and all will go well ; for the gods will have pity on a widow, and the son of a widow."

CHAPTER II.

I WENT to bed with a heart unequally divided between grief and joy. The idea of parting for such a length of time from my dear parent, whose whole happiness I knew was centred in myself, could not but be a painful one ; and this, I think, was uppermost within me while I was undressing, and even for a few minutes after I had laid my head upon my pillow. The natural thirst for novelty, however, for which so large a fund of gratification was now held up to my fancy, did not long suffer these melancholy thoughts to predominate. The love of travel had never before been excited in my bosom ; but now that I knew I was so soon to embark for Italy, the delights which I might there hope to experience came crowding and kindling upon my imagination. The dark and pine-clad banks of my native Anton, said I, shall now be exchanged for that golden-waved Tiber, of which so many illustrious poets have sung—whose course is continually bearing the treasures of all nations to the common centre of earth---the imperial city ; or conveying from thence

to the remotest and most barbarous regions, the dictates of the most refined and exalted people, whose hands have ever been invested with the dominion of the world. Instead of moving here among the ill-cemented and motley fabric of an insulated colony, and seeing only the sullen submission of barbarians, on the one hand, or the paltry vanity of provincial deputies on the other, I shall tread the same ground with the rulers of the earth, and wear, among native Romans, the gown of my ancestors—I shall behold the Forum, which has heard the eloquence of Cicero and Hortensius—I shall ascend to the Capitol, where Cæsar triumphed—I shall wander in the luxurious gardens of Sallust, or breathe the fresh air in the fields of Cato—I shall gaze upon the antique majesty of temples and palaces, and open my eyes on all that art and nature have been able to heap together through eight long centuries, for the ornament of the chosen seat of wisdom and valour. It was thus that one splendid vision chased another across my fancy, till I fell asleep in a bewilderment of wonder and admiration—to dream of nothing but pomps I had never witnessed, and pleasures I had never betaken.

I awoke next morning rather earlier than usual, my spirits I suppose having been too much excited to admit of a longer repose. I came down-stairs in a strange mood; but I believe my demeanour might be one of almost perfect indifference; for, to say truth, the melancholy idea of leaving home and parting with my mother on the one side, and the gay inspiriting prospect of visiting Rome on the other, had neutralized each other within me; at least in so far as was necessary for producing an apparent absence of all keen emotion on my countenance. I could not help starting, however, when, on coming into the old hall in the back part of the house yonder, I found my mother already busily engaged with her maidens in preparing my wardrobe for the purposed journey. She was giving directions to one of them in a distinct voice when I entered; but she broke off suddenly when she saw me, and I could observe that her eyes looked red and heavy. Shortly after, she made an excuse to go into an inner apartment, and then one of the more ancient females said to me, ceasing from her occupation, "Oh yes, Caius; it is one thing to have the appearance of being

occupied among such matters, and another to have one's heart really in them. To my thinking, if your mother had not slept little, she would not have been so early astir, touching these new garments of yours. But the gods grant you a fair voyage, and may you come soon back, such as you now are, to your mother: for without you, her life will be a burden to her; and if you returned from the great city full of such airs as we see in some of those young centurions and the like, none of us would be able to love you as we now do; so that you would find a house not filled with friends (as you will now leave it), but with utter hirelings."

While we were yet speaking, Boto entered the apartment, having been already warned by my mother concerning the journey on which he had been selected to accompany me. It was not certainly on account of his skill in the tongue of Rome that Boto had been chosen for this duty; for although he had lived all his days in the vicinity of the Roman colonists at Venta, there was scarcely a single person within the bounds of the British Bêlgæ that spoke worse Latin than poor Boto. He was, nevertheless, a man of strong natural sagacity, possessing a shrewdness of discernment, concerning whatever things had fallen under his customary observation, such as I have seen excelled in few people of any station. It is true, that he was one of those who lean more to the evil than the good opinion concerning both the characters of mankind and the transactions of the world. But, although this defect had not escaped the observation of my mother, we may suppose that she thought a turn of that sort might be culpable in a British farm-yard, and yet highly advantageous for a young stranger about to visit, for the first time, the great city—which was, and is, the centre of attraction to all the vices, as well as to all the wealth of the universe.

Howbeit, the man entered with a countenance firm and cheerful, in which no one could discover any symptom either of diffidence respecting his own qualifications for this new office, or of regret at being separated from these maidens (the truth is, few of them were either very young or pretty), in whose company so many years of gentle

servitude had already glided equably and comfortably over his sun-burnt countenance and thickly matted head of yellow bristles. He held in his left hand a large broad-brimmed petasus of my father's, which he was polishing with his dexter, that it might assume a more respectable appearance on the meditated expedition; over his shoulder hung an old tunic of dark-coloured cloth, a few rents in whose texture he was desirous of having sewed up by the nimble fingers of some of the damsels. His huge boots already flapped about his ankles. In short, it was visible to all present that the mind of the man was altogether engrossed with the great business of his departure from a soil which, it may be, had, according to his opinion, already too long engrossed the whole of his accomplishments. The carelessness and indifference stamped upon his visage had in them, at first glance, something repulsive to my feelings; but nothing is more effective, in situations of novelty, than the influence of a merry face; and the high animal spirits depicted on the coarse features of Boto were not long in exciting again within me a full portion of that juvenile buoyancy which had been somewhat lowered by my observation of my dear mother's sorrowful deportment.

My mother, coming in soon after, partook, I think, in some measure of the general hilarity which had already been diffused over us all by the mirthful demeanour of the zealous Boto. From time to time, indeed, her countenance fell, and the tremours of her voice indicated how great was the internal conflict of her feelings. The work of the maidens, however, went on unweariedly, and the sounds of the wheel and spindle echoed all day long through the apartment. I myself, glad to escape now and then from the sadness of her looks and the din of their preparations, went forth into my fields, pretending that I had certain necessary directions to give touching the management of the farm affairs previous to so long an absence. But Boto continually threw himself in my way, and discoursing loudly and triumphantly, in his own coarse and jocular manner, concerning the fine sights we were about to see, I found myself constrained not merely to tolerate, but to participate in the liveliness of his mood.

The airs of superiority he assumed in talking to such of the husbandmen as we met with gave them, indeed, visible dissatisfaction, but amused me more than I chose to admit by word or gesture. It was reported to me, that in the evening he invited several of these rustics to drink with him in one of the out-houses, where his exultation knew no limits. He was going to Rome, he said ; for his young master very well knew he could never get on in such a journey without the helping eye and hand of Boto ; and he had a brother in Italy already (he had gone over with a certain illustrious Roman some ten years before), and from him (for he had no doubt he would meet with him as soon as our arrival should be known) he would doubtless receive all requisite information concerning the doings of the great city. The usefulness which, he doubted not, I should be constrained to acknowledge in his manifold qualifications, would, without all question, entitle him to some signal reward—perhaps nothing less than manumission on his return. “In that case, my jolly lads,” cried the fervent Boto, “I shall come back with a whiter tunic among you ; but, believe me, I shall still be the same man I leave you notwithstanding—we shall have a merry cup of mead at our meeting, and I shall tell you all I have seen of the fine things of Rome, and the wickedness of her inhabitants ; for, if we may judge from what we see among these new legionaries, one will have need to keep all one’s eyes about one in the midst of the gowned gentry.”

The two days passed more quickly than any I ever remember to have spent amid this strange mixture of mirth, and sorrow, and noisy preparation. I expected a very melancholy supper with my mother, on the evening of the second ; but, luckily for us both, perhaps, a few of our neighbours, who had heard the news of my approaching departure, came in to pay their respects, and offer their good wishes ; so that the night being far spent ere they went away, we took to our respective chambers without having any opportunity of indulging in needless lamentations together. I arose with a sad heart in the morning, and found breakfast already waiting, my mother having been up a full hour before me. She kissed me

with silent tears when the meal was concluded ; and our horses being already at the gate, Boto and I took leave of them all, and, pushing on, were glad when the winding of the road shut us from the view of the group that remained stationary at the porch of this dwelling. We could not forbear, however, from pausing for a moment when we had reached the height of yonder acclivity. Where that single tall naked pine now stands buffeted by the wind, then grew a thick grove, of which that stately relic alone survives. It was there that I turned round to gaze once more on the quiet verdure of these paternal fields, and our small pastoral stream glistening here and there beneath the shady covert of its margin. Boto turned himself with me, and, in spite of all the glee he had been manifesting in prospect of our journey, I could perceive, from the clouded eye of the peasant, that he too, when it had come to the point, was leaving, not without a struggle, the scene of all the happy years he had yet spent upon the earth. He said nothing, but I saw that his heart was full, and I interpreted the caresses he lavished from time to time on his mule, as so many symbols of the relenting tenderness with which he now regarded all he had left behind him. I, for my part, pushed my horse into a hard trot, being willing to lose something of my heaviness of spirit in the spring of animal exertion. They that knew us saluted us kindly and cheerily as we passed them on the way ; and the bustle of the seaport,* which we reached just as night was setting in, soon swallowed up or discomposed all our attention.

I had at first intended to cross over to Gaul, and traversing that province, enter Italy, either by the route of the Alps, in case we could procure convenient guides and companions, or by some vessel sailing from Marseilles to Forum Julii to Ostium. But the advice of one of my neighbours, who had himself been a great traveller, made me alter this plan, and resolve rather to commit myself to the care of a certain captain, who, as he said, was just about to sail for Italy by the way of the Pillars of Hercules, in a vessel laden with tin from the mines of

* Probably Clausentum, which is supposed to be the same with our Southampton ; or perhaps the ancient Port Peris—i. e. Portchester.

Britain. We found this man, with all his passengers, already prepared for the voyage ; and it was intimated to us that we should certainly set sail at an early hour in the morning.

CHAPTER III.

THE cries of the mariners arranging the tackle of their ship, and the blowing of the pilot's trumpet at the extremity of the pier, were the first sounds that met our ears in the morning. In a few minutes, we, and all our baggage, were safe on board. The anchor was uplifted, and the sail hoisted, with the usual libations and other ceremonies. In a word, such was the hurry in which every thing was done, that I scarcely persuaded myself I was thoroughly awake, till, rubbing my eyes, I perceived the white cliffs already lessening behind us. The first throbs of nausea soon afterward began to agitate my stomach, and I was ere long in too lamentable a condition to enjoy even the grotesque and rueful grimaces by which the visage of Boto signified his unwilling submission to the same inexorable enemy.

It were useless for me to detail to you at length the objects which met our eyes, during a voyage which is every day performed by so many of your acquaintance, and the particulars of which therefore, (I doubt not), have been already abundantly explained to you all. For the first three or four days, indeed, I was so heavily afflicted with this malady, occasioned by the motion of the vessel, that I could bestow but little attention on any external object ; my eyes were so confused and dazzled, that I saw nothing beyond the corner of the deck, on which, for the sake of open air, I had caused my carpets to be laid ; and a few ejaculations to Castor and Pollux were all the articulate sounds that I uttered. By degrees, however, the weight of my depression began to be somewhat alleviated ; and at intervals, more particularly during the night-

watches, if I was not altogether in possession of myself, I was at least well enough to enjoy a sort of giddy and half-drunken delight in watching the dark billows as they rose and retreated from the beak of the ship; the continual dash and roar with which they heaved and writhed, like some innumerable rout of tormented and infuriated monsters; the angry groan with which they received the plunging keel; and the sullen mutterings of disappointed wrath with which their broken strength was afterward heard growling behind the high poop on which I reclined. There were moments also in which the comical behaviour of Boto, under this new species of calamity, could furnish me, as it had already done the more hardy and experienced of my fellow-voyagers, with a great store of mirth. From time to time, indeed, his stomach, naturally of a brazen construction, recovered for a few minutes possession of its usual energies, which were then sufficiently displayed in the enormous messes of salt provisions and biscuit which the hungry valetudinarian devoured in our presence. At these moments, also, the simplicity and quaintness of his remarks failed not to diffuse laughter among all that stood within reach of his voice. For example. Hearing some passenger remark that there was much pleasure in ploughing the deep, he forthwith signified his desire to know in what respects a ship resembled a plough. Whereupon the stranger, laughing, conducted the trembling rustic to the foaming prow, and bade him look down and observe how it cut and disparted the waters like a ploughshare. But Boto then asked, where were the oxen? and he was answered, that the winds were the oxen, and that the ropes and tackling were in place of the reins and traces; an explanation which not a little amazed him. He said, however, after a brief pause, that the sea appeared to him to be already so much furrowed with waves, that, had he been the Greek Jason, he would never have thought of bestowing any additional labour upon it. For which last observation the tawny Boto was commended, as not without ingenuity.

Shortly afterward, being taken with another fit of the nausea (whose unwelcome return had probably been accelerated by the copiousness of his luncheon), poor

Boto lay down at all his length upon the deck, listless and inanimate, rolling his large eyes about heavily and slowly, like some dying fish; and by his lugubrious wailings and contortions exciting the derision of the bystanders, whom he had before more cheaply amused by the simple manner in which he expressed his wonder concerning maritime objects. Near him, upon the deck, sat a certain captain of the Prætorian Bands, one of our fellow-passengers, who, more than any other of those that were in the ship with us, displayed a florid complexion and cheerful eye, unalterable by the fluctuation of the waters. This man had served in all the wars of Agricola, and accompanied that great general even in his perilous circumnavigation of the islands which lie scattered in the stormy ocean to the north of Britain. He had also gone back to Rome with his commander, not, like him, to extenuate imperial jealousy by the affectation of indolence, but to seek for new occupation on some other disturbed frontier of the empire. In Syria and Cappadocia he had spent some years; after which, he had attended the emperor himself through the territories of Mæsia and Illyricum, and all those countries he traversed, and retraversed, during that shameful contest in which so many Roman eagles were made the prey of barbarous enemies, and which terminated at last in that cowardly treaty, by which Domitian granted a kingly diadem to Decebalus, and condescended to place the Roman Senate among the tributaries of a Dacian savage. Our friend had also strutted his part in that gorgeous triumph, or rather succession of triumphs, by which the defeated and disgraced prince, on his return from Dacia, mocked the eyes and ears of the incredulous and indignant Romans. In a word, he had partaken in all kinds of fortune, good and evil, and preserved his rubicundity and equanimity unaltered in them all. Having attained to a situation of comparative ease in the Prætorian Bands, he had now been visiting Britain on a special message from the new emperor, and was returning in the hope that no future accident of fortune, or princely caprice, would ever again make it necessary for him to quit the sports, and shows, and festivities of the capital.

nothing remained to be eat but some hard and mouldy biscuit, which, I believe, had survived two voyages between Italy and Britain. During this unwelcome period of delay, the kind Prætorian endeavoured to give me as much information as he could about the steps necessary to be pursued by me on my arrival in the city. But, to say truth, his experience had lain chiefly among martial expeditions and jovial recreations, so that I could easily perceive he was no great master of the rules of civil life. From him, however, I was glad to find that the reputation of Licinius was really as great at Rome as it had been represented to us in our province; and I could observe, kind as he had been during the whole voyage, that he treated me with a yet greater measure of attention after he was informed of my relationship to that celebrated jurist.

The vessel lay quite steady and unmoved upon the breast of the sea; but, notwithstanding, there were few on board that retired to rest during the last night of our voyage, so great was the excitement of our minds in the prospect of soon touching the soil of Italy. In me, above all, who had never before even gazed upon those illustrious shores, imagination and curiosity worked so powerfully, that, had I retired to my sleeping-place, I am sure I could not once have closed mine eyelids. We sat, therefore, all together towards the prow of the ship, watching the red lustre shed from the Pharos, which mingled on the glassy waves with the softer and more tremulous radiance of the stars. Early in the morning, a light breeze sprung up from the west, and with joyful acclamations the sails were once again uplifted. The number of mariners on board was insufficient for impelling the heavily laden vessel altogether by the force of oars, but now they did not refuse to assist the favouring breeze with strenuous and lively exertion. The Prætorian captain, Sabinus, cheered and incited them by his merry voice, and even the passengers were not loath to assist them in this labour. My slave, among the rest, joined in the toil; but his awkwardness soon relieved him from his seat on the bench—a disgrace which, without

question, he would have shared with his master, had I been equally officious.

In a word, the green waves were shorn rapidly asunder by our keel; and ere long, we could trace with exactness, the form and shape of those enormous structures by which the munificence of Augustus had guarded and adorned that great avenue of nations to the imperial city. Those huge mountains of solid marble projected on either side into the open deep, between which the heavy billows of Tiber could be seen forcing their way into the bosom of ocean—but still preserving, for a space, their own distinctness of colour—surpassed every notion I had ever been able to form of the extent to which human art may carry its rivalry of nature. Their square and immoveable masses were garnished here and there with towers and battlements, on which the Prætorian pointed out to me the frame-work of those terrible catapults, and other enormous engines of Roman warfare, of which no specimens have ever been seen by us in Britain. As we drew nearer, we could distinguish the faces of the innumerable crowds collected on the mole to receive us, and the other vessels whose approach had been deferred overnight by the supervening calm. At length we crossed the bar, and our hawsers were affixed in safety to the rings of the pier.

CHAPTER IV.

No sooner had we stepped upon the shore, than we were surrounded by a great throng of hard-favoured persons, who pulled us by the cloak, with innumerable interrogations and offers of service. Among these, the varieties of form, complexion, and accent were such, that we could not regard them without especial wonder; for it appeared as if every tribe and language under heaven had sent some representative to this, the great seaport of Rome. The fair hair and blue eye of the Gaul or German might

here be seen, close by the tawny skin of the Numidian or Getulian slave, or the shining blackness of the Ethiopian visage. The Greek merchant was ready, with his Thracian bondsmen carrying his glittering wares upon his back—the usurer was there, with his arms folded closely in his mantle—nor was the Chaldean or Assyrian sooth-sayer a-wanting with his air of abstraction and his flowing beard.

Boto, as if alarmed with the prevailing bustle, and fearful lest some untoward accident should separate him from me, kept close behind me, grasping my gown, I rather think, with his brawny hand. But our good friend Sabinus did not long leave us in this perplexity ; for, having hastily engaged the master of a small barge, whom he found there, to carry him to Rome, he insisted that I and my attendant should partake of this easy method of conveyance along with him. Having intrusted this man, therefore, with the care of all our baggage, and appointed the time at which we should be ready to depart with him, we followed the guidance of the Prætorian into a neighbouring tavern ; for he asserted it would be absurd to leave Ostium without having first regaled ourselves with a good breakfast, after the long abstinence (so it pleased him to speak) of our voyage. Nor in truth did we require much persuasion ; for the smell of some new loaves, which a certain lad was carrying on his head in a basket, had already affected us with a strong desire to banish from our palates the flavour of the mouldy ship-biscuit. With bread, then, hot out of the oven,—with bunches of golden grapes on which the morning dew had not yet had time to dry,—and milk, warm and foaming from the cow, we feasted in a primeval, indeed, but nevertheless in a luxurious manner. One flask of rich Falernian we exhausted on the spot ; but reserved several others to be consumed during our ascent of the Tiber. The very firmness of the ground beneath the foot is, after a long sea-voyage, sufficient to give hilarity to the traveller ; and there is exquisite delight in simply walking up and down, and stretching forth legs and arms with the security of land motion. In this gratification Boto, above all others, abundantly indulged himself ; insomuch, that the centu-

tion and I, while we were under the hands of the barber, could not help laughing at the uncouthness and extravagance of his rustic agility, displayed in the inn court, of which the window of our apartment commanded a prospect. The barber was willing to clip our hair, as well as to shave our beards, but Sabinus prevented me from yielding to this exertion of his skill by a derisive gesture; and told me afterward, that had I submitted to such an operation at Ostium, I should probably have been unfit to appear in public at Rome for a fortnight; for, said he, the leaders of the fashion change the style of their hair-dressing continually, and it would be thought extremely barbarous to enter the theatre or the baths, or to be seen at any spectacle, without having taken care to follow their example in all such particulars.

Shaved, therefore, but not clipped, we removed, as soon as our business at Ostium was ended, to that part of the river where our boat waited for us; Boto following at our heels, in company with a freedman belonging to Sabinus, and bearing in a basket our store of Falernian for this lesser voyage. We found the vessel small but convenient, furnished with a beautiful awning, under which cushions and carpets were already stretched out for our repose. The oars were soon in motion, and we began to emerge from among the forest of masts with a rapidity which astonished me; for the multitude of vessels of all sizes, continually crossing and re-crossing us, was so great, that at first I expected every moment some dangerous accident might occur. The skill, however, of the steersman, and the alacrity with which the boatmen shipped their oars on either side when the signal was given from the helm, were such, that we soon perceived there was no peril in our circumstances; insomuch, that ere long I found myself stretched out at full length, in an attitude of perfect unconcern, occupied with nothing but the view on the shores of the river; for from these even the remarks of my merry companion had no power to draw me away. By degrees, indeed, even these failed altogether to keep alive my attention—the sleeplessness of the preceding night, and the abundance of our recent repast, conspiring to lull me into a gentle doze, which continued for I know

not what space. I awoke greatly refreshed, and found we had already made considerable progress ; for the continual succession of stately edifices, each surpassing the other in splendour, on the banks of the stream, failed not to indicate the greater vicinity of the metropolis. The dark green of the venerable groves, amid which the buildings were for the most part imbosomed, and the livelier beauties of the parterres which here and there intervened between these and the river, afforded a soft and refreshing delight to my eyes, which had so long been fatigued with the uniform flash and dazzle of the Mediterranean waves, and the roughness of the sea-beaten precipices. The minute and elaborate cultivation everywhere visible—the smoothness of the shorn turf on the margin—the graceful drooping foliage of the ancient planes and alders—but, above all, the sublimity of the porticoes and arcades, and the universal air of established and inviolable elegance which pervaded the whole region, kept my mind in one continual elevation of pleasurable wonder. Here and there a gentle winding of the stream conducted us through some deep and massy shade of oaks, and elms, and sycamores ; whose branches, stretching far out from either side, diffused a sombre and melancholy blackness almost entirely over the face of Tiber. Loitering carelessly, or couched supinely, beneath some of these hoary branches, we could see, from time to time, the figure of some stately Roman, or white-robed lady, with her favourite scroll of parchment in her hand. The cool and glassy rippling of the water produced a humming music of stillness in the air, which nothing disturbed, save only the regular dash of the oars, and, now and then, the deep and strenuous voice of our cautious helmsman. Anon would ensue some glimpse of the opening campaign, descending with all its wealth of golden sheaves to the very brink of the river—or, perhaps, the lively courts of a farmyard stretching along the margin of some tributary streamlet—or some long expanse of level meadow, with herds of snow-white heifers. I could not gaze upon the rich and splendid scene without reverting, with a strange mixture of emotions, to the image of this my native land ; its wild forests, shaggy with brushwood and un-

profitable coppice, through which of old the enormous wild deer stalked undisturbed, except by the adder of the grass, or the obscene fly of the thicket; its little patches of corn and meadow, laboriously rescued from the domain of the wild beast, and rudely fortified against his continual incursions;—the scattered hamlets of this our Brigian valley,* and my own humble villa—then far humbler than it is now. At one moment—how strange, said I to myself, that I, born of a Roman father, and allied to some of the greatest names of Rome, should be only now for the first time surveying the near effects of Roman magnificence and refinement! It is time, indeed, that my eyes should be taught to look on other objects than those to which they have hitherto been accustomed. At others, I could not check altogether some rising reflections of a more melancholy nature. Alas! said I to myself, with a distrustful shaking of the head—these gorgeous prospects are indeed the results and the symbols of ancient cultivation—and these beautiful mansions are inhabited by refined and noble dwellers. But who shall say what measure of true happiness is enjoyed by those that I see here, sauntering though they be, even as the poets have feigned the careless demeanour of their Elysium? Who shall say, but a few months ago, how many of these I behold would gladly have escaped from the near arm of imperial tyranny, and the mutual suspicions of oppressed and injured men, into some wild ravine of Britain, to lay down their head every night in safety, and awaken to contend with no cunning but that of the fox—no ferocity but that of the boar.

When the heat of the sun was greatest, we pushed our bark into a little creek, where the boatmen rested themselves for a space from their labours; and we, along with the master, made an end of the provisions we had brought along with us. Having halted as long as we deemed expedient, we resumed our seats on the vessel; but the fervour of the atmosphere being much diminished, our canopy was no longer upheld. By degrees the shades of

* The village of Broughton, on the road from Winchester to Salisbury, is supposed to mark the site of the Roman *Brigæ*. It stands not far from the river Test, anciently called the Anton, or Entum.

evening began to spread themselves over the east ; but we did not see the sun for a long time previous to his setting, by reason of the hugeness of the trees, and their impervious foliage. Trees, and temples, and gardens, and meadows, and towns, and villages, were, ere long, lost in one uniform sobriety of twilight ; and it was already quite dark, when the centurion, pointing to the left bank, said, " Behold these gigantic willows, which dip their long boughs down into the water—these are the gardens of Cæsar—beyond, is the Portian Gate, and the street of the Rural Lares. In a few moments we shall see the lights of the Sublician Bridge, and be in the city."

At these words I started up, and gazing forward, could already penetrate through the mists of evening into the busy glare of a thousand streets and lanes, opening upon the river. The old city wall, on the left side, was visible ; where, after having swept round the region towards the Vatican and Janicular Hills, it brings the last of its turrets close down to the Tiber, over-against the great dock-yards by the Field of Brutus.

Its shadow lay in frowning darkness far out upon the stream, and we glided for some minutes in silence beneath the influence of the venerable rampart. Through a forest of triremes, galleys, and all sorts of craft, we then shot on to the bridge—beneath the centre arch of which our steersman conducted us. Beyond, such was the hum of people on the quays, and such the starlike profusion of lights reflected in the water, that we doubted not we had already reached the chief seat of the bustle of Rome. On, however, we still held our course, till the huge bulk of the theatre of Marcellus rose like a mountain on our right. It was there that we ran our bark in to the shore, not far from the little bridge—the third as you ascend the river—which conducts to the island and the temple of Æsculapius. While our friend was settling matters with the master, and the boatmen were bringing out our baggage, I stood for a little space by myself in silence, on the elevated quay. Below me lay the bark, in which Boto and the centurion were still engaged. Here am I alone, I might almost say to myself, in the greatest city of the world—not one of whose inhabitants I have ever, so far

as I know, conversed with. Up and down, wherever my eye fell, it rested on some bright spot in the river, answering to some light in bark or edifice, kindled by hands and for purposes to which I was equally a stranger. Here a long tier of reflected radiance bespoke, it may be, the vicinity of some splendid portico—of palace, or temple, or bath, or theatre; there a broad and steady blaze of burning red indicated the abode of artisans, resolved, as it seemed, on carrying their toil into the bosom of the night. Between, some small single speck of tinier lustre betrayed, perhaps, the lamp of the solitary student, or the sober, social hour of some peaceful family, assembled around the hearth of their own modest lares. Behold me then, said I, in the capital of the globe. Alas! were I to be swallowed up this moment in the waves of Tiber, not one of all these lights would be dimmed by reason of my calamity.

After my companions had joined me, the dwelling of Licinius was the first thing I inquired after; and being informed that it was at no great distance, the friendly Sabinus insisted upon escorting me thither in safety, before he repaired to his own abode. We walked, therefore, along two or three proud streets, which brought us near to the Pantheon of Agrippa, and there the house of my kinsman was easily pointed out to us by some of the passers-by. Its porch was decorated with recent palm-branches, which, as the centurion asserted, must have been placed there by the joyful hands of some fortunate client, whose cause had that day been pleaded and won by the orator. Here having taken leave of this kind person, and having promised to visit him ere many days should elapse, I and my faithful Boto at length arrested our steps. The gate was thrown open as soon as we knocked; and, having left my attendant among the crowd of slaves in the vestibule, I was speedily conducted into the presence of my kinsman, who received me in a polite and, at the same time, affectionate manner.

I found him in a small upper chamber, lighted by a single silver lamp, suspended from the roof, enjoying, as it appeared, repose and relaxation after the exertions which he had been making during the anterior part of the day.

He was reclining at table when I entered ; and although supper was long over, some fruits and other trifling things still remained on the board. At table with him there was no one present, excepting a certain rhetorician or philosopher, whom he introduced to me as the superintendent of his son's education, and the young Sextus himself, a modest and ingenuous youth, who sat at the lower extremity of his father's couch. He was indeed a very mild and amiable young man, and I had more pleasure, after a space, in surveying his aspect than the more marked lineaments of the other two. At first, however, nothing riveted my attention so much as the fiery and energetic physiognomy of the pleader himself. The forepart of his head was already quite bald, although the darkness of the short curls behind testified that age was not the cause of this deformity. His eyes were black and rapid, and his eyebrows vibrated upwards and downwards in a remarkable manner, not only when he spoke, but even when he was silent ; indicating, as it appeared by their transitions, every new train of thought and imagination within his mind. His style of conversation was quick and fervid, and his gestures vehement as he spoke ; it being apparent, that from restlessness and vanity of disposition, he was continually exercising a needless measure of mental activity and anxiety. Not satisfied with his own more than sufficient richness of ideas, no thought could be expressed by any other person which he did not immediately seize for his own, and explain, even to him by whom it had been first suggested, with much fluency and earnestness of illustration. On the other hand, the hired philosopher, who wore a long beard reaching down even unto his girdle, preserved in all things an uncommon demureness of manner, restraining every salient movement of his own mind, and watching, with the gravity of a Numa, the glancing eyes and sharp features of his patron. A roll of yellow parchment graced the left hand of this dealer in wisdom, while the other was employed in selecting from the table such articles as were most agreeable to his palate. Licinius, although meager in person, and at that time parched with long declamation, seemed to live in such a state of intellectual excitement that he thought little either of eating or drinking ; there-

fore the venerable stoic, resigning for the most part his share of the conversation, amused himself, in exchange, with the more trivial gratifications abandoned to him by the pleader. Nor, if one might draw any conclusion from the rosiness of his complexion, and the portliness of his whole figure, was this the first occasion on which he had exercised that species of humility. Partly fatigued by my travel, partly confounded by the novelties I had seen and heard, and was now seeing and hearing, I myself did not disdain from time to time to taste of the fine old Chian of Licinius; a huge flagon of which that stood on the board already rose light in my hand, by reason of the eager though not very frequent familiarities of the disciple of Zeno.

When Licinius had inquired of me concerning my native place, and those kinsmen whom he had in that distant region, and when he had also spoken at some length of the affairs which had brought me to the city, his conversation was naturally directed to subjects which were more new, if not more interesting to me. "You would no doubt observe," said he, "the palm branches at my door. They were won to-day, by a five hours' harangue before the Centumviri, wherein, if I did not satisfy myself, it appears that my friends, nay, even my customary opponents, have discovered no ground of complaint. It is only in contests such as these that able men have now any opportunity to exercise themselves, and preserve some remembrance of those ancient worthies and great public characters that once adorned the state. To these things, therefore, O Valerius, I entirely devote myself; nor aim, like other citizens of my rank, at passing the day in slothful diversion, and ending it with far-fetched luxuries. At supper my table is furnished only with moderate fare; while, in other houses, I know not how many roasted boars and pompous sturgeons have been regaling, with the rich perfume of their sauces and stuffing, the nostrils of guests who love the meat more than the man who gives it. This worthy person, whom I retain in my dwelling to instruct my only surviving son, knows how laborious is my course of life, and what an impatient crowd awaits my appearance every morning that I rise. The

young man himself will, I hope, ultimately tread in the same steps, and afford to a future generation the image of the former Licinius." With these, and the like discourses, he occupied our ears till it was time to retire to sleep; and then he intimated to me that he had allotted to me an apartment in his house, which he expected I would continually occupy during my residence in the city. But being informed that I had a British slave along with me, he insisted on having this man sent for into the supper-chamber, that he might see him, as he expressed it, before the genuine unsophisticated barbarian had been corrupted by keeping company with the lying Greeks, and other cunning menials of the metropolis. Whereupon, it was commanded that Boto should come up; and he was forthwith ushered in by a certain leering varlet, with rings in his ears, whose face resembled some comic mask in the habitual archness of its malicious and inquisitive look.

Not few were the bows and scrapes with which my Briton entered the penetralia of this great Roman's mansion; neither was the astonishment inconsiderable with which the keen eyes of the orator rested upon the coarse and tawny outlines of Boto's visage. "So, friend," said Licinius, "and you have ventured to come to Rome without so much as shaving your beard!" But the merry and good-natured tone in which these words were uttered having somewhat reassured the bashful rustic, he gave a sly side-look towards the stoic (who, it must be observed, had never once looked at him, but sat back in his couch all the time, preserving unmoved the sage severity of his demeanour), and replied to Licinius, "Pardon me, O master, for coming thus into your presence; but I knew not, till Dromo here told me, that beards were worn in Rome only by goats and the wisest of mankind." The words of the barbarian amused the orator—but, turning round to his own slave, "Ah! Dromo," said he, "do I already recognise the effects of your teaching?—beware the whip—and corrupt not this honest Briton, at your peril." He then asked of Boto various questions concerning his recent voyage; to all of which he made answers in a sufficiently sagacious manner, after his own fashion.

Great contempt, however, was depicted on the face of the silent stoic during this conversation ; which he, no doubt, looked upon as a very unworthy condescension on the part of Licinius ; till at last, having, in a leisurely manner, poured out and drank the last of the flagon, the indignant Xerophrastes (for that was his name) arose from his couch and departed. As he withdrew, he unfortunately struck his knee on the corner of the table, which elicited from his stubborn features a sudden contortion, expressive of anguish. This, however, he immediately smoothed off ; and, twisting his involuntary stoop into an obeisance to Licinius, the sage walked away in a sufficiently grave and decorous manner. The young lad, whose name, if I have not already mentioned it, was Sextus, did not witness these circumstances without turning away his face to hide a smile ; but I, fearing to diminish his respect for his master, refrained from joining him in any outward expression of mirth.

CHAPTER V.

LICINIUS then showed me the way to my sleeping-room, to which I was glad to retire, being in fact quite worn out by the number of objects which had that day tasked my sight. My sleep was sound and sweet ; nevertheless, when the morning began to dawn, I was awakened by the first glimmerings of light, and found that my thoughts became at once too busy to admit of a return to slumber. I therefore arose, and went to walk in an open gallery with which my chamber was connected. This gallery commanded a prospect of a great part of the city, which at that hour appeared no less tranquil than stately, nothing being in motion except a few small boats gliding here and there upon the river. Neither as yet had any smoke begun to darken the atmosphere ; so that all things were seen in a serene and steady light, the shadows falling broadly westward over streets and squares—but pillars,

and porticoes, and obelisks, and arches, rising up everywhere with unsullied and undisturbed magnificence, into the bright air of the morning. The numerous poplars and alders, and other lofty trees of the gardens, also seemed to be rejoicing in the hour of dew and silence; so fresh and cheerful was the intermixture of their green branches among the surrounding piles of white and yellow marble. Near at hand, over the groves of the Philoclean Mansion, I could see the kingly dome of the Pantheon, all burnished with living gold—and the proud colonnades of the Flaminian Circus, loaded with armies of brazen statues. Between these and the river, the theatres of Pompey and Marcellus, and I know not how many beautiful temples, were visible, each surpassing the other in chaste and solemn splendour. Across a more crowded region to the westward, my eye ascended to the Capitol, there to be lost among the central magnificence of the Mistress of the World; while, still farther removed from me (although less elevated in natural situation), the gorgeous mansion of the Emperor was seen, lifted up, like some new and separate city, upon its enormous fabric of arcades, high over all the remains of that forest of elms and sycamores by which Nero had once dared to replace the unhoused tenants of the Palatine. Behind me, the Flavian Amphitheatre,* the newest and the most majestic of all Roman edifices, detained the eye for a space from all that lay beyond it—the whole splendid mass, namely, of the Esquiline—and those innumerable aqueducts which lie stretched out, arch after arch and pillar after pillar, quite over the peopled champaign to the very ridge of the mountains. But why should I vainly essay to give to you, by cold words of description, any idea of the peerless prospect that everywhere surrounded me! Lost amid the pomp of this unimagined human greatness, I was glad to rest my sight, ever and anon, upon the cool waters of old Tiber, in whose face nothing of all this was truly depicted, except the serene and cloudless beauty of that Italian sky; temple and tower, and every monument of art, being mellowed down into a softer and more tolerable grandeur.

* The Coliseum.

As I stood upon a projecting balcony, looking abroad upon the Imperial City, I heard some person stepping softly along the floor, and, being screened by some pillars, looked back into the gallery without subjecting myself to observation in return. The noise, I found, was occasioned by one of the slaves of Licinius (the same I had remarked over night), who had an air of much vigilance about him on this occasion, looking about from side to side with a very anxious expression of countenance, as if afraid of being detected in some impropriety. I heard him tap gently at the door of one of the apartments adjoining to my own, and thought I could distinguish from his whisper that it was Sextus on whom he called. It was even so ; for very shortly after—that modest young man, opening the door, courteously asked, “ Well, Dromo, good Dromo, what news ?—Have you seen or heard any thing of her ?—Speak low, I beseech you, and remember that my preceptor sleeps in the next room.”

“ Which preceptor ?” replied Dromo : “ count me your best preceptor, and I will teach you how to manage all the rest.”

“ Xerophrastes, I mean. Speak low, Dromo,” said the young man in an earnest whisper ; “ he is close at hand ; and if he be thus early astir, as is not improbable, with these eternal parchments, he may hear every word you say—be quiet, I pray you.”

“ Poh, poh,” returned the slave ; never mind the black-bearded Athenian, for I have found out some curious facts about him lately, which will serve to bridle his tongue at any time. I will ride upon him and rein him in the most beautiful manner, so that you will admire to see the motions I can draw out of him.”

“ Oh Dromo, Dromo,” said Sextus, shaking his head, “ remember that a rhetorician is far above the sphere of a rascally slave like you ; and if I find you attempting to ride your betters any farther than is absolutely necessary in this affair, I will pluck you from your seat, Dromo, and lay you sprawling on the sand at once.”

“ Well, well ; do not speak so loud,” replied Dromo ; “ but I think it is natural for all slaves to have an antipathy against these grammarians, who often despoil them of

their just influence in a family ; and, in fact, make mere slaves of them."

"A great hardship to be sure, Dromo ; and what would you have ?"

"I would have a reasonable share of influence, Master Sextus, and neither more nor less than my due."

"Your due, Master Dromo," replied the youth, "is to be seen in the thong of sleek leather which hangs at the foot of the staircase ; and many is the time and oft that I have saved you from it ; for which you may perhaps have to thank the beauty of her who has rendered you necessary to me, as much as my own good nature. But no more idle words at present—what have you got to tell me ?"

"I have just been down," answered he, "to the herb-market, by the river-side yonder—for that early sort of drudgery is sure to be laid on my back ; but I do not complain of my hardships for this once. Well—I had made my bargain, and was coming away, when I saw one of old Capito's men, who had just come in from the villa, driving an ass laden with choice articles from the country, which he told me were meant as presents for different persons. Whereupon it forthwith occurred to me, that I might perhaps be able to suck something out of him concerning the young lady. So I asked the man if there was any present for his master's brother Lucius, the senator. To which he replied, that he had brought nothing for Lucius but a letter ; adding, that he believed its purport was to invite the two young ladies to come out and enjoy the beauty of the season. 'And when,' said I, in a careless manner, 'do you suppose they may be coming?'—'Oh, this very day, I suppose,' quoth he ; 'for I heard orders given about their apartments.' Now, my dear Master Sextus, I no sooner got this information from him than I ran hither as swiftly as my legs would carry me. You can easily go out, as if by chance, to pay your respects to the old gentleman. You will there have an opportunity of seeing her for a long while together ; and perhaps be able to put in a word for yourself ; for they say there's nothing helps on a courtship so much as a shady walk among the fields."

"Ah, Sempronia!" cried Sextus, "then I shall approach you, and speak to you at last. What will she think when she sees me there? and how will she speak to me?"

While he was uttering these words, Dromo suddenly started, and came peeping, on tiptoe, towards the place where I stood. Whereupon I stepped from behind my pillar, and said to the astonished youth, "Fear not, Sextus, that I shall intermeddle with your secrets, or make any use of what I have accidentally overheard. But I wish you would satisfy my curiosity, and inform me who is this lady, and what may be the meaning of all this concealment."

Here Dromo, perceiving that his young master was a good deal confused, came forward and said, "From observing your looks last night, when I was making a handle of yon barbarian to torture our friend of the porch, I think you are a good-natured person, who would not willingly bring any of us into trouble. The truth is, that Licinius wishes my young master here to marry a certain lady, who has already had wet eyes over the ashes of a first husband; but who is of noble birth and very rich. Now Sextus, being only eighteen, does not like this great lady so well as she likes him—and has, in fact, lost his heart elsewhere."

"Dromo," answered I, taking young Sextus by the hand as I spoke, "this is a pretty common sort of story; but I shall take no side till I have seen both of the ladies; and the sooner your ingenuity can bring that about, the more shall I be beholden to you."

"We shall try," replied the slave, observing that I had overcome the reluctance of the lover; "but in the mean time I observe that the clients are beginning to assemble in the porch, to await the forthcoming of Licinius. Go, therefore, and get some breakfast for yourselves, for, by-and-by, you will both of you be expected to accompany the orator to the Forum, to hear him plead; which, between ourselves, will be, I guess, a good six hours' job for you, unless you manage matters dexterously."

This last hint produced a visible effect on the countenance of Sextus; but, nevertheless, we went down to-

gether immediately to an apartment where some bread and grapes were prepared for us; and there, with much juvenile ingenuousness, he opened his heart to me concerning those things with which I had fortuitously been made acquainted. But what surprised me most of all was to hear, that although he had been enamoured of Sempronius for several months, and was well acquainted with several of her relations, he had never yet seen her except at certain places of public resort, nor enjoyed any opportunity of making known his passion. While I was expressing my astonishment at this circumstance, we were interrupted by Xerophrastes, who came to inform us that Licinius, having already descended into the hall, was about to issue forth, and desirous of our company, if no other occupation detained us. We accordingly followed the philosopher, and found his patron where he had indicated, pacing to and fro, in the highest state of excitation, like a generous steed about to scour the field of battle. The waxen effigies of his ancestors stood at one end of the hall, some of them defaced with great age; and upon these he frequently fixed his ardent eyes. Seeing me enter, he immediately cried out, "Come hither, my friend and kinsman, and I shall presently conduct you to a scene worthy, above all others, of the curiosity of a stranger."

With this, arranging his gown, and putting himself into a dignified attitude, he ordered the porter, who stood chained by the door, to throw wide its massy valves; which being done, the litigants and consulters who were without received the orator with acclamations, and surrounded him on all sides. Some of the poorer ones I observed kissing the hem of his garment, and dodging wistfully at his elbows, without ever attracting a word or look from him; while those of a higher class came forward more familiarly, seeking to impress particular circumstances upon his memory, and paying him compliments on the appearance he had made the day before in the Centumviral Court. Encircled by this motley group, he walked along towards the great Forum which is also called the Roman—followed at a little distance by Sextus, the preceptor, myself, and some freedmen of his household. In moving on, we passed, by accident, the door

of another great pleader, by name Bruttianus, who stood there attended in a similar manner. When he perceived Licinius, this man took from his doorpost a green palm-branch, and waved it towards us in a vaunting manner; but our friend, saluting him courteously, cried out, with his sharp and cutting voice, "We shall try it again." Whereon Xerophrastes, immediately stepping up to his patron, began thus—"How this vainglorious person exposes himself!—he is certainly a weak man; and his tones, by Hermes, are more detestable than those of an African fowl." At which words, Sextus tipped me the wink; but I did not observe that Licinius was at all displeased with them. Yet, soon after, Bruttianus having overtaken us, the processions were joined, and the two great pleaders walked the rest of the way together in a loving manner, exchanging complimentary speeches; to which Xerophrastes listened with a very edifying gravity of visage.

At length we entered that venerable space, every yard of whose surface is consecrated to the peculiar memory of some great incident in the history of Rome. Young Sextus allowed me to contemplate for some time, with silent wonder, the memorable objects which conspired to the decoration of this remarkable place; but after the first gaze of astonishment was satisfied, proceeded to point out, in order, the names and uses of the principal structures which rose on every side over its porticoes—above all, of its sublime temples—into whose cool and shady recesses the eye could here and there penetrate through the open valves. Nor did the ancient rostrum, from which Tully had declaimed, escape our observation—nor, within its guarding rail of silver, the rising shoots of the old mysterious fig-tree of Romulus—nor the rich tessellated pavement which covered the spot that had once yawned an abyss before the steady eye of Curtius—nor the resplendent Milliarey pillar which marked the centre of the place. In a word, had the gathering crowds permitted, I could have willingly spent I know not how many suns in listening to the explanation of such magnificent objects; but these, and the elevated voice of Licinius, who was just beginning his harangue, soon compelled me to attend to things of another description.

Within one of the proud ranges of arcade on the side nearest to the Capitoline cliff and stairs, a certain majestic patrician had already taken his seat on an elevated tribunal—his assessors being arranged on a lower bench by his side, and the orators and clients congregated beneath him. The first who addressed him was, as I have said, Licinius; and truly, although his speech was not of very great length, it was sufficient to impress me with an admiration of his genius, such as I had never before been constrained to feel for any display of talent exhibited in my presence. I know not, indeed, if, in the whole wide range of human accomplishments, there be any one the first contemplation of which inspires so much wonder into the breasts of those unaccustomed to its exercise as this of oratory. It is the first and great natural weapon by which intellect asserts its superiority over corporeal strength; and, therefore, to acknowledge its power in him that witnesses its energies is, in effect, a vindication of the dignity of his own nobler part. The most refined and expert in the ways of men can never entirely defend themselves against this celestial weapon, any more than they can open their eyes and yet refuse to bear witness that there is light in heaven, or walk abroad at noonday and not feel the fervour of the sun. But if they cannot fail to acknowledge this godlike power, those that, like myself, come strangers to the scene of oratorial triumph, cannot fail to bow down and submit themselves, in awful homage, beneath its sway. When I heard the clear and harmonious periods of my kinsman following each other in their undoubting sweep of energy; when I observed with what apparent skill he laid his foundations in a few simple facts and propositions, and then with what admirable art he upreared from these a superstructure of conclusions, equally easy as unexpected—equally beautiful as ingenious; when, above all, he had conducted us to the end of his argument, and closed the whole magnificent strain with one burst of passionate eloquence, in which he seemed to leave even himself behind him, I could not but feel within myself as if I had been till now a stranger, not only to the most splendid but to the most awful of enchantments—as if I had now, for the first time, contemplated the

practised strength of reason, and the imbodied might of the soul. Such were my raptures on hearing the first oration of Licinius ; and truly the applauses painted in the faces of those that surrounded me were a sufficient pledge to me that they did not spring from my own inexperience. Yet I have lived to discover that the talent which so greatly excited my wonder is often possessed from nature, or acquired through practice (though not, it is true, to any thing like the same splendid extent or perfection, yet in a measure which, at that time, would have afforded me scarcely inferior delight), by men whose understandings are of no extraordinary rank. It was not till after many visits to the Roman Forum that I found myself enabled to discriminate between the real merits of a speaker of genius like my kinsman, and that trick of wordiness by which some of the most commonplace and prosaic of his rivals at first affected me with almost as much admiration as I could bestow on himself.

The keen and lively gestures of the fervid Licinius, whose soul seemed to speak out of every finger he moved, and who appeared to be altogether immersed in the cause he pleaded, were succeeded by the solemn and somewhat pompous stateliness of Bruttianus, who made a brief pause between every two sentences, as if he were apprehensive that the mind of the judge could not keep pace with the stream of his illustrations, and looked round ever and anon upon the spectators with a placid and assured smile, rather, as it seemed to me, to signify his approbation of their taste in applauding him than his own pleasure in their applauses. Nevertheless, he also was a splendid speaker, and his affectation displeased the more because it was evidently unworthy of his understanding. While he was speaking I observed that the stoic preceptor was frequently shifting his place among the crowd, and muttering everywhere expressions of high contempt. But this did not disgust me so much as the gross adulation of that fixed attitude of ecstasy in which he listened to the discourse of his own patron, and the pretended involuntary exclamations of his delight. "Oh admirable cadence !" he would say ; "I feel as if I were draining a honeycomb. Oh harmonious man, where have I, or any

other person here, sucked in such sweetness!" These absurd phrases, however, were caught up forthwith, and repeated by the numerous young men who hung upon the skirts of the orator, and seemed, indeed, to be drinking in nectar from the speech, if one might judge from their countenances. From their taking notes in their tablets from time to time, and from the knowing looks they assumed at the commencement of every new chain of argument, I guessed that these might be embryo juriconsults, preparing themselves by their attendance for future exertions of the same species; and, indeed, when I listened to their conversation at the close of every speech, I thought I could perceive in their tones and accents studied mimicry of the natural peculiarities of Licinius, Bruttianus, and the other orators. Altogether, the scene was to me as full of amusement as of novelty, and I could willingly have remained to the end of the discussion. But looking round, my eyes chanced to fall upon young Sextus, and I could not but see that his mind was occupied in matters quite remote from the business of the Forum, and the merits of the pleaders. He stood with his arms folded in his gown, and his eyes fixed upon the ground, only lifting them up from time to time with an impatient air towards a side entrance of the Forum, or to observe by the shadows on the opposite porticoes what progress the sun was making towards the south.

Perceiving, at length, that Xerophrastes had his back turned towards us, and that his father was entirely engaged with his tablets during the speech of another orator, he plucked me by the sleeve. I understood his meaning from his looks, and followed him quickly through the crowd, nor did we look back till we had left the noise of the forensic assembly entirely behind us. "I am depriving you," he then said, "of no great gratification, for that old creature is indeed possessed of much natural shrewdness; but the asperity of his temper is such, that I am sure you could not have listened to him for many minutes without great disgust. In fact, he is excessively bitter, from observing that his reputation is rather eclipsed by some other younger people, and looks for all the world like some old worn out and discarded cat, grinning from the top of the wall at the amorous dalliance in which his faithless

mistress is indulging some sleeker rival of the whisker. You are too good-natured to be able to find any delight in the angry sneerings of such an envious person ; and his age would prevent you at the same time from willingly giving way to any contemptuous emotions. Let us depart from the city, and I will be your guide to the villa of Capito. But if any questions be asked on our return, you can say I was anxious to show you something of the other regions of the city."

CHAPTER VI.

ALTHOUGH anxiety to show me the city was to be the pretence for the sudden departure of Sextus from the Forum, nothing could be less in his intentions than to waste any further portion of the morning in what he naturally enough imagined might be just as well deferred to some other day, during which he should have no prospect of meeting with the fair Sempronia. He hurried me forward, on the contrary, in a manner which all my sympathy with his emotions could hardly prevail upon me to pardon, through twenty noble streets, and past innumerable glorious edifices, before each of which I would gladly have paused—such was the yet unsated ardour of my curiosity. Nevertheless, seeing him entirely wrapped up in his own anxious thoughts, I did not oppose myself to his inclinations. Ere long, having passed the Hill of Gardens, I found that we had gained the eastern limit of the city. His steps increased in rapidity when he perceived that we were treading the free surface of the Salarian way ; in-somuch that I could scarcely cast even a passing glance on the lofty pillars and other funereal monuments which confer such an air of solemn magnificence on that wide avenue of the capital.

A sharp walk of about an hour and a half brought us within sight of the suburban of Capito. A lofty wall protected the fields of this retirement from the intrusive

eyes of passengers on the public road, over whose summit nothing could be discovered but the tall green boughs of planes and sycamores waving to and fro in the gentle agitation of the western breeze. We entered by a small side-door, and immediately found ourselves, as if by some magical delusion, transported from the glare of a Roman highway, and the hum of men, into the depth and silence of some primeval forest. No nicely trimmed path conducted our feet through the mazes of this venerable place. Every thing had at least the appearance of being left as nature had formed it. The tall fern rustled beneath us as we moved ; the untaught ivy was seen spreading its careless tresses from tree to tree overhead ; the fawn bounded from the thicket, and the scared owl screamed on the pine-top. By degrees, however, the gloom lessened around us as we approached the mansion itself, till at length, over an open space of lawn, we perceived the simple but elegant porch of entrance, and the line of colonnade that extended all along that front of the building. We passed under the porch, and across a paved court, in which a fountain was playing, into the great hall, the windows of which commanded all the other side of the place—a most noble prospect of elaborate gardens gradually rising into shady hills, and lost in a distance of impenetrable wood. Here a freedman attended us, who informed us that Capito had retired from the house into a sequestered part of the grounds with some friends from the city ; but that if we chose we could easily join him there. We assented, and following his guidance, ere long traversed no narrow space of luxuriant cultivation. From one perfumed terrace we descended to another ; till, having at last reached a certain green and mossy walk, darkened all its length by a natural arching of vines and mulberries, the freedman pointed to a statue at the farther end of it, and told us it stood over-against the entrance of his master's summer-house. When we reached the statue, however, we could not at first perceive any traces of the summer-house. The shaded avenue terminated in face of a precipitous rock, from which there fell a small stream that was received beneath in a massive basin, where its waters foamed into spray without transgressing the margin. A thousand delicious plants and far-sought

flowers clustered around the base of the rock and the brink of the fountain, and the humming of innumerable bees mingled with the whispers of the stream. We stood for a moment uncertain whether we should move on or retire, when we heard some one calling to us from the centre of the rock ; and presently, passing to the other side of the basin, descried, between the rock and the falling water, a low entrance into what seemed to be a natural cave or grotto. We stooped, and passing its threshold, found ourselves within one of the most luxurious retirements that was ever haunted by the foot of dryad. A sparry roof hung like a canopy of gems and crystals over a group of sculptured nymphs and fauns, which were placed on a rustic pedestal within a circular bath, shaped out of the living stone. Around the edge of the waveless waters that slumbered in this green recess were spread carpets rich with the dies of Tyrian art, whereon Capito was reposing with his friends. He received Sextus with the warmest kindness, and me with distinguished politeness, introducing us both to his companions, who were three in number—all of them, like himself, advanced in years, and two of them wearing long beards, though their demeanour was destitute of any thing like the affected stateliness of our friend Xerophrastes. These two, as our host informed us, were Greeks and rhetoricians—the third, a patrician of the house of Pontii, devoted, like himself, to the pursuits of philosophy and the pleasures of a literary retirement. They were engaged, when we joined them, in a conversation which had sprung from the perusal of some new metaphysical writer, on which they were delivering very different opinions. One of the Greeks, the more serene looking of the pair, was defending its doctrines, which I guessed to be those of the Garden, with earnestness of manner, although in a low and measured cadence of voice ; the other espoused the opposite side, of the Porch, with much quickness of utterance and severe animation of look ; while the two lordly Romans seemed to be contenting themselves, for the most part, with listening, although it was not difficult to perceive, from the expression of their countenances, that the one sided in opinion with the stoic, and the other (which was Capito himself), with the Epicurean disputant.

They all arose presently, and proceeded to walk together, without interrupting the conversation, along the same shaded avenue which Sextus and myself had already traversed. He and I moved along with them, but walked a little in their rear—my companion being still too much abstracted to bestow his attention on what they were saying; while I myself, being but little an adept in such mysteries, amused myself rather with the exterior and manners of the men themselves, than with the merits of the opinions they were severally defending. The two Greeks were attired in the graceful costume of their own country, which was worn, however, far more gracefully by the Epicurean than his brother,—the materials of his robe being infinitely more delicate, and its folds arranged with studied elegance, whereas the coarse garment of the stoic had apparently engaged less attention. Nevertheless, there was a much more marked difference between the attire of Capito and that of Pontius Mamurra; for the former was arrayed in a tunic of the whitest cloth, beneath which appeared fine linen rollers, swathing his thighs and legs, to protect them, as I supposed, from the heat and the insects, and a pair of slippers, of dark violet-coloured cloth, embroidered with silver flowers; while the other held his arms folded in the drapery of an old but genuine toga, which left his yet strong and sinewy nether-limbs exposed to the weather, all except what was covered by his tall black sandals and their senatorian crescents.

As we passed on, our host from time to time directed the attention of his visitors, more particularly of the two Greeks, to the statues of bronze and marble, which were placed at convenient intervals along the terraces of his gardens. The symmetry of these figures and the graceful simplicity of their attitudes inspired me with I know not what of calm and soothing pleasure such as I had never before tasted, so that I thought I could have lingered for ever amid these haunts of philosophic luxury. The images were, for the most part, portraits of illustrious men—Greeks, Romans—sages and heroes; but beautiful female forms were not wanting, nor majestic representations of gods and demi-gods, and all the ethereal imaginations of the Grecian poets. Seeing the name of Jupiter

inscribed upon one of the pedestals, I paused for a moment to contemplate the glorious personification of might and wisdom, depositing, at the same time, a garland of roses at the feet of the statue—upon which I could observe that my behaviour furnished much cause of mirth to the Epicurean Demochares; while, on the contrary, Euphranor, the disciple of the Porch, approved of what I did, and rebuked his companion for saying any thing that might even by possibility disturb the natural piety of an innocent youth. But the Roman stoic stood by with a smile of stately scorn; and utter indifference was painted on the countenance of Capito. At another time, Sextus having staid behind to examine the beauties of a certain statue of Diana, which represented the goddess stretched out in careless slumber on the turf, with a slender greyhound at her feet, the Epicurean began to rally me on having a taste inferior to that of my friend, whose devotion, he said, could not be blamed, being paid to an exquisite imitation of what the great Nature of things had decreed should ever be the most agreeable of all objects in the eyes of a person of his age. “Whereas you,” continued he, “appear to be more occupied with deep-hung eyebrows, ambrosial beards, and fantastic thunderbolts, and the other exuberances of Homeric imagination.”

To this reproach I made no reply, but Capito began to recite some noble verses of a hymn of Calimachus, in which both the Greeks joined him; nor could any thing be more delightful than the deep rolling grandeur of those harmonious numbers. A sudden exclamation of Sextus, however, ere long interrupted their recitation, and Capito, looking up a long straight pathway, leading from the villa, said, “Come, Valerius, we shall soon see whether you or Sextus is the more gallant to living beauties, for here come my two nieces, Athanasia and Sempronia; and, I assure you, I don’t know of which of them I am the more proud. But Sempronia has indeed more of the Diana about her, so it is probable she may find a ready slave in our friend Sextus.”

We advanced to meet the young ladies, who were walking slowly down the avenue, and their uncle, having tenderly saluted them, soon presented us to their notice.

Sextus blushed deeply when he found himself introduced to Sempronia, while, in her smile, although she looked at him, as if to say she had never seen him before, I thought I could detect a certain half-suppressed expression of half-disdainful archness—the colour in her cheeks at the same time being not entirely unmoved. She was, indeed, a very lovely girl, and in looking on her light, dancing play of beautiful features, I could easily sympathize with the young raptures of my friend. Her dress was such as to set off her charms to the utmost advantage, for the bright green of her Byssine robe, although it would have been a severe trial to any ordinary complexion, served only to heighten the delicious brilliancy of hers. A veil, of the same substance and colour, was richly embroidered all over with flowers of silver tissue, and fell in flowing drapery well-nigh down to her knees. Her hair was almost entirely concealed by this part of her dress, but a single braid of the brightest nut-brown was visible low down on her polished forehead. Her eyes were black as jet, and full, as I have already hinted, of a nymph-like or Arcadian vivacity—together, indeed, she was such a creature as the Tempe of the poets need not have been ashamed to shelter beneath the most luxurious of all its bowers.

The other young lady—it is Athanasia of whom I speak—she was not a dazzling beauty like Sempronia, but beautiful in such a manner as I shall never be able to describe. Taller than her cousin, and darker haired than she, but with eyes rather light than otherwise, of a clear, soft, somewhat melancholy gray—and with a complexion for the most part paler than is usual in Italy, and with a demeanour hovering between cheerfulness and innocent gravity, and attired with a vestal simplicity in the old Roman tunic, and cloak of white cloth—it is possible that most men might have regarded her less than the other; but for my part, I found her aspect the more engaging the longer I surveyed it. A single broad star of diamonds planted high up among her black hair, was the only ornament of jewelry she wore, and it shone there in solitary brightness, like the planet of evening. Alas! I smile at myself that I should take notice of such trifles in describing the first time I ever gazed on Athanasia,

At the request of the younger lady, we all returned to the grotto, in the neighbourhood of which, as I have already mentioned, our tasteful host had placed the rarest of his exotic plants, some of which Sempronia was now desirous of inspecting. As we paced again slowly over those smooth shaven alleys of turf, and between those rows of yews and box, clipped into regular shapes, which abounded in this more artificial region of the place, the conversation, which the appearance of the two beauties had disturbed, was resumed ; although, as out of regard to their presence, the voices of the disputants pursued a lower and milder tone than before,—a natural mark of respect, by-the-way, to the gentleness of female spirits, which we must all have remarked on many occasions. I must confess, however that, mild as was the manner of the discourse, I could not help being somewhat astonished, and even displeased, with finding that a virtuous and polite Roman could permit such topics to be discussed in the hearing of females ; above all, that he did not interpose to prevent Demochares from throwing out so many sarcastic reflections concerning the deities whose statues were placed in the garden. A beautiful Mercury in particular, which we all paused to admire, elicited many sarcastic observations, that I could easily see were far from being agreeable to the fair cousins. But the greatest of all was my wonder at the behaviour of Capito himself, who, after we had again entered that delightful grotto, turned himself to me as if peculiarly, and began a deliberate and ingenious piece of declamation concerning the tenets of his favourite philosophy,—such as the fortuitous concourse of atoms, the transitory and fluctuating nature of all things, and the necessity of snatching present enjoyments, as nothing permanent can be discovered whereon to repose the mind. With great elegance, indeed, of language and illustration, did he enlarge on these golden theories of the sages of the Garden ; nor did he fail to intersperse his discourse with many exquisite verses from Lucretius and other poetical followers of his sect. Such, however, was the earnestness of his declamation, that I could not help believing him to be quite sincere to what he said, and asked him, not without anxiety, whether he had all his life been an Epicurean, or whether it was only

of late that he had espoused that discipline. Nor have I at this distance of time any difficulty in recalling the tenor of his answer. "Young man," said he, "the question you have now put to me is not the first instance I have had of your sagacity; which, indeed, considering at once your age and provincial education, is such as may truly command the respect of all of us. To be born wise, Fate or Heaven has denied to the children of human race. It is their privilege to win wisdom for themselves; the fault is their own if they do not die wise.

"When a young man first enters upon the theatre of the world, bright hopes are around him, and he moves onward in the buoyancy of conscious power. The pride of young existence is the main and animating centre of all his thoughts; or rather, it is the essence and extract of all his innumerable sensations. Rejoicing in the feeling of the real might that is, it is his delight to think—to dream—of might existing and exerted as for ever. New to the material, but still more new to the moral world, he believes in the stability of all things whose transitory nature has not been exhibited before him. New to the tricks of mankind, he believes that to be said truly which, why it should be said falsely, he is unable to conjecture. For him, superstition has equal potency to darken the past and illuminate the future.

"At that early period when ignorance is of itself sufficient to produce a certain sort of happiness, the ambition of the human mind is too high to admit the reception of such doctrines as I, an old man, and an experienced traveller in the mazes of the world, have no shame in avowing. But time moves on, young man, and every hour some tender plant of *hope* or of *promise* is crushed into the dust beneath his unmerciful tread. The spirit clings long and closely to its favourite delusions. The promise that is destroyed to-day springs into life to-morrow in some new shape; and Hope, like some warring deity of your poets, bleeds and sickens only to revive again. Nevertheless, disappointment at length gathers to itself the vigour of an enduring form. The horizon becomes colder and darker around our sphere of vision—the soul waxes faint and more faint within our bosoms. It is then that man at last be-

gins to recognise the true state, not of his own nature alone, but of all things that surround him—that, having tasted much of evil, he is taught to feel the value of good—and weaning himself from vainglorious dreams, learns the great lesson of practical wisdom, to enjoy the moments as they pass—to snatch some solid pleasure at least amid a world of vision and imagination; so, in a word, as the poet has expressed it, he may not have reason to complain in the hour of death that he has never lived.

“In me,” he continued, “you behold one that has gone through the experience necessary to produce an entire acquiescence in these doctrines. I am one of those, O Valerius! who have resolved to concentrate, after this fashion, the whole of my dreams upon the hour that is. There are not wanting, indeed, here and elsewhere, persons who profess the same theories, only in the view of finding excuse and shelter for the practice of vice. But till it be proved that the practice of vice is the best means of enjoyment, in vain shall it be asserted by our opponents that our doctrine is essentially adverse to virtue. The mistakes or the misdeeds of individuals must be estimated for nothing; for where is the doctrine that may not be shown to have been defended by impure livers? The founder of our sect is acknowledged, by the most virulent enemies of his theories, to have been the most blameless of men, and they, I must take leave to believe, can never be sincere friends of virtue who doubt that he who is a true worshipper of pleasure may also be the worshipper of virtue.”

There was a certain something, as I thought, more like suppressed melancholy than genuine hilarity in the expression of the old man's face, as well as in the tone of his voice, while he gave utterance to these sentiments; nor did any of those present appear desirous of protracting the argument; although I did not imagine from their looks that any of them had altered their opinion. What, however, I could not help remarking in a particular manner was, the gentle regret painted in the beautiful countenance of Athanasia while her uncle was speaking. The maiden sat over-against him all the while, with her cheek

supported on her left hand, pale and silent, with an expression of deep affection and tender pity. From time to time, indeed, she cast her eye upward with a calm smile, but immediately resumed her attitude of pensive abstraction. Her uncle took her hand in his when he had done speaking, and kissed it tenderly, as if to apologize for having said any thing disagreeable to her. She smiled again upon the skeptic, and then rising gracefully, walked by herself (for I could not help following her with my eye) down into a dark walk of pines that branched off at the right-hand from the entrance of the grotto. There I saw her stoop and pluck a beautiful pale flower, streaked all over as with spots of blood. This she placed in her bosom, and then rejoined us with a more cheerful aspect; after which, we all walked towards the villa. Nor did it escape my notice, that, although Sempronia appeared willing to avoid Sextus as we went, it always happened by some accident or other that he was nearer to her than any other person of the company.

They were both at a little distance behind the rest of the party, when Euphranor addressed himself to me, saying, "Is not this young man, your companion, the same that is under the guidance of a certain rhetorician, by name Xerophrastes?"

"The same," said I, "and a wary, sage-looking person indeed is his tutor. I believe he also is of the Porch."

"Yes, no doubt he is of the Porch," interrupted Demochares; "anybody may see that with half an eye, my good friend Euphranor; for he has a beard that Zeno himself might have been proud of, and walks withal in as dignified a manner as if he conceived himself to be the chief pillar of the Porch, if not the very Porch itself."

"Yes, yes, who shall prevent Demochares from having his jest?" replied the stoic Euphranor with great gravity; "but Valerius must not be permitted to go away in the belief that this hero of the beard is really what he pretends to be."

"Why, what does the man pretend to be?" cried our host; "he wears a long beard, and writes himself Athenian and rhetorician—I see no pretence in the matter."

"Oh no, Capito," says Euphranor, "you cannot be in earnest in what you say ; the man is a mere quack and, for that matter, if you only heard him utter ten words, you would be abundantly satisfied that he is no Athenian. The man is by birth a Thessalian, and his gutturals still remind one strongly of his native hills."

I felt considerably interested in this discourse, and would gladly have heard more of it, but it was interrupted by the nearer approach of the rest of the party, and, ere long, we all entered the house together.

CHAPTER VII.

BEFORE the hour of taking the bath, we exercised ourselves for some time in the tennis-court, where I could not help wondering very much at the vigour and agility displayed by old Capito and his companions. I was then conducted into the baths, where, after being washed and perfumed in the most luxurious manner, I was arrayed in an elegant supper-garment by one of the slaves of our host. At table we were joined again by the ladies, who both reclined on the same couch with their uncle. Three comely youths alone attended us, in short tunics, and girt with napkins of fine linen ; but, during the repast, an ancient female slave stood in silence behind the couch of the young ladies. A small fountain of alabaster played between two tall candelabra of the same material, at the farther end of the apartment ; and a young damsel stood beside them, swinging slowly from time to time a silver censer, from which clouds of delicate odour rolled up to the mirrored roof.

In all things the feast was splendid ; yet there was no appearance of useless or vain ostentation. Every thing was conducted in a style of great calmness and order, without the least formality. The repast interrupted not the conversation, which went on in a manner to me equally instructive as entertaining ; although I must con-

fess, the presence of Athanasia sometimes rendered me inattentive to what was spoken. I could not divest myself of the idea, that some unknown circumstance was pressing on the mind of the fair creature—that some secret feeling had obtained the chief possession of her thoughts; and that when she smiled upon those that addressed her, it was oftentimes only to conceal her ignorance of that which had been said.

Being asked by Capito, I endeavoured, among other things, to inform him and his friends, as far as I could, concerning the then condition of this island, which, more particularly after the exploits of Agricola, had naturally come to be a subject of much interest in the imperial city. In return, the chief topics of public concern which then occupied the capital were discussed by them, as I perceived, in a great measure on my account; and I listened with delight to the praises, which they all agreed in bestowing on the heroic and beneficial sway of the new emperor. Many anecdotes were narrated, which tended to strengthen the feelings of reverence and admiration with which I had already been accustomed to contemplate the character of Trajan. But others were told, as the conversation went on, which I could not so easily reconcile with the idea I had previously formed of him.

In particular, I was not a little disturbed with what they told me concerning his treatment of the Christians, who, as we understood in Britain, had been suffered to live in tranquillity ever since Nerva acceded to the empire. But now, from the circumstances related to me, it appeared that the mild and humane Trajan had taken up, in regard to this unfortunate sect, the whole aversion of Domitian himself; insomuch, that every day some cruel catastrophe was made known of some person who had adopted their tenets. Being ignorant of the nature of these tenets, and having heard only in general terms that they were of Jewish origin, and in their nature extremely dark and mystical, I was at a loss to conceive any rational method of accounting for the extreme hatred of the prince, or rather for his condescending to give himself so much trouble concerning a matter of so much obscurity and apparent indifference.

Capito, however, assured me, that although I might have good occasion to wonder at the steps taken by the emperor, it would no longer be said by any one that the progress of the Christian sect deserved to be considered as a matter either of obscurity or of indifference. "On the contrary," said he, "from what you have just heard of the numbers and quality of those that have lately suffered various punishments on account of their adherence to this strange superstition, you cannot hesitate to admit that the head of the empire has been justified in considering it as a subject well worthy his attention. As to the merits or demerits of the superstition itself, or of those that have embraced it, these are very different matters."

"The only question," said Mamurra, "with which Trajan had any business, was, whether this Jewish superstition be, or be not, inconsistent with the established religion of our ancestors and the state. Rome has grown and flourished under the protection of the gods our fathers worshipped; and the laws and institutions of the empire are all built upon the foundation of reverence for these guardian deities. If this Asiatic worship can exist along with that of the gods of the Capitol, what should we or any have to say against it? We have adopted the gods of many nations; nor do I see why, because the Jews have been unfortunate in a contest with Rome, we should take it for granted that their deities are unworthy of respect. Destiny has willed that Rome should be the mistress of the world; but it seems neither necessary nor fitting that she should carry her control into the secret parts of men's minds, and interfere with their notions of religious obligation. If, however, it be so, as we have all heard asserted, and as I doubt not Trajan believes, that he who embraces the creed of the Christians becomes from that hour an infidel in regard to the deities of Rome, and, therefore, a scorner of those principles on which the security of the Roman government and law is established; then, I say, the prince does well in extirpating such an intolerant and intolerable superstition. And if the thing be in itself deserving of such severity, I do not see that we should attach any blame to Trajan for behaving as he has done. Domitian was a tyrant and a monster of

humanity, and Nerva was wise and good; and yet it may be, that in regard to these Christians, the principle of Domitian's conduct was right in the main, and that of Nerva's wrong in the main. As to the unnecessary brutalities of *the fly killer*,* we have no occasion to take them into the account. But you, my friend Capito, regard both sides of the question, I have no doubt, with pretty much the same measure of indifference."

"Nay," replied Capito, "in this matter you do me very much injustice. I never can regard with indifference any question in which the interest of the empire and the honour of Trajan are concerned. And moreover, it would be great hypocrisy in me to pretend that I can regard without concern any question which involves, as I think the present assuredly does, one of the greatest interests of the whole human race—I mean the right of adopting, each man for himself, whatever opinion may appear to be the most rational concerning all matters of religious belief. But if you mean only to say, that I am indifferent about the nature of this Christian superstition, you are, I must confess, so far in the right. I have no knowledge of its dogmas, and I have no great desire to have any knowledge of them. I presume they have their full share of that old eastern barbarity, in the shady places of which the elder Greeks used to think they could discover the outlines of something really grand and majestic. But as for me, I have ceased, as you well know, to be a student of any such mysterious and difficult matters."

"There is no occasion," resumed Mamurra, "why you should give yourself any trouble about them. I do not pretend, any more than you, to enter into the merits of the Christian superstition; I only say, that if the superstition be found incapable of subsisting among the subjects of the Roman state without danger to the public interest, the prince does well in repressing its progress. That is the *only question* of which I spoke."

* Domitian was so called, in consequence of the reports circulated concerning the nature of his solitary pastimes. Hence the famous answer recorded in Suetonius: "Is there any one with Cæsar?" "No—not even a fly."—*Ne musca quidem*.

"There is, indeed, no other," said Capito, "and I thought of none."

"And how do you answer it, dear uncle?" cried Athanasia (lifting herself up, for the first time, to take part in the conversation).

"Nay, Athanasia, my love," said the old man, "to answer that is the business of the prince, and of the senate—not mine. I meddle not with it at all; I only regret that blood should be shed and citizens exiled; above all, in the reign of a just and merciful prince. Sempronia," continued he, "what is that strange story your father was telling about one of the daughters of Serennius?"

"Of Serennius Tertulla, do you mean?" said Sempronia.

"Yes, Sempronia, it was the same."

"Oh, uncle!" replied Sempronia, "her story was nothing extraordinary, as times go. It was only, that she had a flirtation with a handsome young Greek, and the handsome young Greek happened to be a Christian—and she was converted by the handsome young Greek—and she was found out in going with him to some secret assembly of these people, in a vault somewhere by the Vatican Hill—and her papa has been glad to send her to Corsica, or some other desolate island, partly to escape the notice of the lawyers, and partly, I suppose, in hopes that the quietness of the island, and the absence of all the handsome young Christians, may, perhaps, in time restore poor Tertulla to her right mind—this is all. Do you think that a strange story, uncle?"

"Not if it be exactly as you have told it, Sempronia; but I am afraid you have been wicked enough to give it a colouring of your own. What says Athanasia?"

Athanasia started on being addressed so by her uncle, but made no reply, except that she was sorry for Tertulla, and had never heard any thing of the handsome young Greek before. I could not, however, help suspecting, from the expression of her face, that she knew more of the affair than she was willing to acknowledge; for she was the only one of the company who did not laugh at the account given of it by her cousin. On the contrary,

her looks were graver than before ; and I would fain have asked her whether she had been a friend of this Tertulla at any time, but was afraid that I might appear impertinently inquisitive, and therefore kept silence.

By this time the evening was somewhat spent, and the increasing darkness of the chamber warned us that we ought to be thinking of our return to the city. I looked towards Sextus as if to signify what I thought, but he refused to meet my eye, although I perceived he was not unconscious of my purpose. At the moment, however, when I was on the point of speaking, the room, which, as I have said, was cloudy, was getting rapidly darker, became all of a sudden filled with so deep a shade, that none of us could help remarking it ; and Sempronia, leaping from her couch, exclaimed, that she was sure there was thunder in the skies, for that she felt as if there were something stifling in the air, and the stillness all around was like that of midnight.

No sooner had she said so than we found she had judged aright ; for the deep voice of the thunder was heard as if rending the woods around, and flash after flash of lightning gleamed along the horizon ; and anon, after a brief pause, the wind howled as if set free from some captivity, and the rain began to fall in big, heavy drops. Every one sat silent, as if awe-struck ; but Sempronia was the only one that seemed to be in terror from the tempest. Nevertheless, my eyes rested more on Athanasia, who looked paler than she had done, although her countenance still preserved all its serenity, and her eyes were turned calmly towards the open doors of the portico, in the region where the lightnings had been visible.

The rain poured down heavily for a space, and the wind was loud along the grass, and in the air, till the thunder began to mutter again from among the distant trees, and then all other sounds ceased, as if rebuked and chastened before its voice. I looked and saw the fire dart across the eastern sky, and heard the terrible growling from the low clouds. "How awful," said I, "is the voice of Jupiter !" Athanasia folded her arms upon her bosom, and lifting her eyes to heaven, made answer in a whisper, "How awful is the voice of God !" She then dropped

her left hand on the end of her couch, and half unconsciously taking hold of it in mine, I asked her if she was afraid. "No," said she, "I am not afraid; but the heaviness of the air makes me a little faint, and I never can listen to the thunder without feeling something extraordinary within me." In saying so, she did not withdraw her hand from mine, and I thought I felt it tremble; but perhaps this might have been no more than the suggestion of my imagination.

By degrees, the sounds of the thunder were heard more and more distant; but, the rain and the wind continuing all around us, Capito said he could not think of our going into the city that evening, and that we must all make up our minds to remain in the villa. The countenance of Sextus brightened up when he heard him say so, and he looked to me as if to ask my assent. To say the truth, I was as willing to stay as he could be; so we easily permitted ourselves to be persuaded, and our host despatched a messenger to Rome, to inform Licinius of the cause of our absence. The old man then led us into another apartment, which was richly furnished with books and paintings. Here he read for some time out of one of the poets to a party, none of whom, I am afraid, were very attentive in listening to him, till, the hour of rest being come, the attendants entered, and we were conducted to our several apartments, Sextus and myself, indeed, being lodged in the same chamber.

CHAPTER VIII.

WE were no sooner left alone than I began to rally my friend on the beauty of his mistress, and the earnest court he had been paying her during the whole of the day. The youth listened with blushes of delight to the praises of Sempronia, but seemed not to have the least idea that he had been so fortunate as to make any favourable impression on her mind. On the contrary, he scarcely

appeared to be aware of having done any thing to attract particular attention from her, and expressed much astonishment when I assured him that his behaviour had been such as could not possibly admit of more than one explanation in the eyes of a person so quick and vivacious as the lovely Sempronia.

After we had both retired to our beds, and the lights were extinguished, we still continued for some time to talk over the incidents of our visit, and the future prospects of Sextus and his love; until at length sleep overpowered us in easy bonds, and agreeable dreams followed, I doubt not, in the hearts of us both, the thoughts and sights of a delightful day. Mine surely were delightful, for they were all of Athanasia. Yet, even in these visions of the night, I could never see her face without some strange impression of mystery. I saw her placid smile—I heard the sweet low cadence of her voice—but I felt, and I could not feel it without a certain indescribable anxiety, that her deep thoughts were far away busied about something of which I knew nothing.

I awoke early, and lay for a long while ruminating in silence. The most natural explanation of all things appeared to be, that she was occupied with some secret, perhaps unhappy passion. But I know not how it was, that I could not bring myself to rest satisfied with this conclusion.

I arose, and drew near to the bed of Sextus; but seeing that he was fast asleep, and that a quiet smile was on his lips, I could not think of awaking him. But the sun shone bright into the apartment, and I resolved to walk forth and breathe the balmy air of the morning.

My steps were directed, almost unconsciously, to the same part of the gardens where I had first seen Athanasia on the preceding day. The moisture was still lying heavy there on the green paths, and the birds were singing among the glittering leaves; the godlike statues stood there in their silent beauty,—the lightnings had not scathed them—the wind had not shaken them—and the rain-drops had fallen on them only to refresh their pale loveliness. I walked to and fro, enjoying, without an effort, the enchantment of the scene;—a new feeling of

the beauty of all things seemed to have been breathed into my soul, and the pensive grace of Athanasia hovered over my imagination, like some presiding genius of the groves.

At length I found myself near the favourite grotto of Capito, and I stood over-against its entrance for some space, contemplating the augmented stream as it fell from the superincumbent rock, and regretting the ravage which the nightly tempest had made among the slender shafts and delicate blossoms of the flowers that were planted around its basin. Twice I thought I heard the murmurs of a human voice near me, and twice I persuaded myself that it was only the rippling of the waters; but I listened more attentively, and the third time I was satisfied that some person must be in the grotto. I passed between the water and the rock, and looking in, beheld the fair creature that had been occupying so many of my thoughts kneeling far in the grotto, with her back to the place where I stood.

Her long black tresses hung all down her shoulders; her hands seemed to be clasped before her; and although she was silent for the moment, I was satisfied that the sounds I had heard had been those of supplication. To disturb her by advancing farther would have been impious; to retire without the risk of disturbing her almost impossible: but I remained there fixed to the spot, without perhaps considering all these things, as I should have done. The virgin modesty of her attitude was holy in my eyes, and the thought never occurred to me, that I might be doing wrong in permitting myself to-witness the simple devotions of Athanasia. "Great God, listen to my prayers," was all I understood of what she said; but she whispered for some moments in a lowly and fervent tone, and I saw that she kissed something with her lips ere she arose from her knees. She then plunged her hands into the well, by whose brink she had knelt, and turned round to the light. "Athanasia, forgive me," was already on my lips; but on seeing me, she uttered a faint cry, and fell prostrate upon the marble. I rushed forward in an agony, and found that she had swooned away. I lifted up her head, and laid it in my bosom, and laved water on

it from the fountain, till I saw her lips tremble. At last she opened her eyes, and after gazing on me wildly for a moment, she gathered her strength, and stood quite upright, supporting herself against the wall of the grotto. "Great heavens!" cried I, "in what have I offended, that I should be rendered the cause of affliction to Athanasia? Speak, lady, and say that you forgive me."

"I thought," said she, with a proud calmness, "that Valerius was of Roman—of patrician blood. What brings him to be a spy upon the secret moments of a patrician maiden?"—Then bursting into a tone of unutterable fervour, "Speak," said she, "young man, what have you heard? How long have you stood here? Am I betrayed? Am I ruined for ever? Tell me the worst, and let me begone to my kindred."

"Witness, heaven and earth!" cried I, kneeling to the ground before her, "and witness, every god, that I have heard nothing, except to know that you were praying. What you asked I know not—to whom you prayed I know not—I have only seen you kneeling, and been guilty of gazing on your beauty."

"You heard not the words of my prayer?" said she.

"No, not its words, Athanasia, nor any thing of its purpose."

"Do you swear this to me, young man?"

"Yes, I swear by Jupiter and by Rome—as I am a man and a Roman, I know not, neither do I desire to know, any thing of what you said. Forgive me for the fault of my indiscretion—you have no other to forgive."

Athanasia paused for a moment, and then resuming more of her usual tone of voice (although its accents were still somewhat disturbed and faltering), said to me, "Valerius, since the thing is so, I have nothing to forgive—I blame you for nothing—I have nobody to find fault with but myself. It is you that must pardon me for my suspicion and my fervour. I have injured you, and I repent of it."

"Distress me not, Athanasia," said I, "by speaking such words as these. You wound me more than ever, if you proceed."

"From this hour, then," said she, "what has passed here is forgotten by us both. We blot it from our memo-

ries;" and with that, as if in token of the paction, she extended to me her hand. I kissed it as I knelt, and swore that all things were safe with me; but added, as I arose, "that I was afraid I should be promising more than I should be able to perform,—did I say I should be able to forget any hour or any place where I had seen Athanasia?"

"Nay," said she, "no compliment, or I shall begin to suspect you of insincerity."

I was then about to withdraw from the grotto; but seeing a scroll of parchment lying at the feet of Athanasia, I stooped and presented it to her, saying, "I was afraid she might forget it."

She took it eagerly, and saying, "Of that there was no danger," placed it in her bosom, within the folds of her tunic. She was then gathering up her black tresses, and fastening them hastily on the back part of her head, when we heard the sound of footsteps not far off, and beckoning to me to remain where I was, she darted from me, and in a moment vanished among the trees. I waited for a few minutes, and then stepping forth, beheld her walking at a distance, beside her cousin, in the direction of the villa. They were soon lost among the paths, and I returned alone into the grotto.

I sat down beside the dark well, wherein she had dipped her hands, and mused in a most disturbed mood on all the particulars of this strange and unexpected interview. Every motion of her features—every modulation of her voice, was present with me; I had gathered them all into my heart, and I felt that I must cherish them there for ever. From the first moment I saw her, my eyes had been constrained to gaze upon her with an interest quite novel to me; but now I knew that she could not smile without making my heart faint within me, and that the least whisper of her voice was able to bring tears into my eyes. Now I thought of my own unworthiness, and could not help saying to myself, "Why should a poor ignorant provincial, such as I am, be torturing himself with the thoughts of such a creature as this?" Then again some benign glance of hers would return before me, and I could not help having some faint hopes that her innocent heart might be won to me by faithful unwearied

love. But what always threw me back in despair was, the recollection of the mystery that I knew hung over her mind, although what it was I could not know. That she had been saying something in her prayers which could not be overheard without *betraying*,—nay, as she said, *ruining* her,—she had herself confessed to me. What could be this strange secret, so cherished in dread and in darkness by this lovely maiden? A crime? No, no crime could sully the clear bosom of her innocence; no consciousness of guilt could be concealed beneath the radiant beauty of that heavenly visage. But perhaps, although guiltless herself, she had been made the confidant of some erring,—some unhappy friend. Perhaps, in her prayer, she had made mention of another's name, and implored the pardon of another's guilt * * * *. Last of all, why might it not be that the maiden loved, and was beloved again in secret; that, from circumstances to me unknown and impenetrable, she might have reason to regard any casual betrayal of her love as a calamity; and that, having uttered the name of her lover in her secret supplications, her terrors might all have been occasioned by her apprehensions of my having overheard it? And yet there was something in the demeanour of Athanasia that I could not bring myself to reconcile entirely with any one of these suppositions. Had she feared that I had overheard any confession of guilt,—even of the guilt of another,—surely some semblance of shame would have been mingled with her looks of terror. Had she apprehended only the discovery of an innocent love, surely her blushes would have been deeper, and her boldness less. Yet the last solution of the difficulty was that which haunted me the most powerfully.

When I came forth into the open air I was astonished to perceive that the sun was already high in heaven, and I proceeded in haste towards the villa, not doubting that Sextus and Capito would be greatly astonished by the length of my absence. I found them and the ladies walking under the northern colonnade, having returned, as they told me, from a fruitless search after me through almost the whole of the garden. I looked to Athanasia, as if to signify that she well knew where I might have been

found ; but, although I saw that she perfectly understood my meaning, she said nothing in explanation. Sextus drew me aside shortly after, and told me that his father had sent to inform him that our presence was necessary in the city before supper-time, to attend a great entertainment which was to be given that evening by the lady whose cause he had successfully pleaded in the Forum on the preceding day ; which lady, I now for the first time learned, was no other than the same Marcia Rubellia to whom his father was very anxious the youth should be married. The success of this pleading had increased very much the wealth of the lady, and of course, as Sextus very well knew, the anxiety of Licinius for the proposed union ; and to remain at the villa any longer was, he said, entirely impossible, since he already suspected his father had not been quite pleased with him for leaving the Forum the day before without staying to hear out a cause in which his duty, if not his inclination, ought to have made him feel so greatly interested.

We bade adieu, therefore, to our kind host and the young ladies, not without more reluctance than either of us durst express, and ready promises to return soon again to the villa. We found Dromo and Boto waiting for us at the gate, the former of whom looked a thousand unutterable things at his young master and me when we joined them, while the latter appeared to be as joyful in seeing me again as if we had been parted for a twelve-month. The two slaves were mounted on asses, but they led horses for our conveyance ; so we mounted with all speed, and were soon beyond the beautiful enclosures of the villa of Capito. As soon as we were fairly out of sight of the house, Dromo began to ply Sextus with innumerable questions about the result of the visit, all of them in bad Greek ; that, as he said, there might be no chance of what passed being understood by *the druid* ; for by that venerable designation, he informed us, the primitive Boto had already come to be best known in the vestibule of Licinius. " Ah ! " - quoth he, " there is no need for many words ; I am sure my young master has not been behindhand with himself. If he has, it is no fault of mine, however. I put Opportunity into his hands, and she, you

know, as the poets say, has only one lock of hair, and that is in front."

Sextus being very shy of entering into particulars, I found myself obliged to take upon me the satisfying of the curiosity of this inquisitive varlet, which I did in a manner that much astonished Sextus, who by no means suspected that in the midst of my own attention to the other cousin I had been able to take so much notice of what passed between him and Sempronia. However, the good youth took a little raillery all in good part, and we laughed loudly in unison at the triumphant capers which the whip of Dromo made his poor ass exhibit in testimony of his satisfaction with the progress which all things appeared to be making. We reached the mansion of Licinius about three hours after noon, and were told by the slaves in attendance that Xerophrastes had gone out some time before, and that Licinius himself was already busy in arraying himself for the feast of Rubellia.

CHAPTER IX.

HER mansion was situated about the middle of the Suburra, in a neighbourhood nowise splendid, and itself distinguished, on the side fronting to the street, by no uncommon marks of elegance or opulence. A plain brick wall covered almost the whole of the building from the eye of the passenger ; and what was seen deserved the praise of neatness rather than that of magnificence. Nevertheless, the moment one had passed the gate, and entered the court, one could not help perceiving that taste and wealth had been alike expended abundantly on the residence of Rubellia : for the broad terrace and gallery behind were lavishly adorned, the one with sculpture and the other with paintings ; and the gardens, which these overlooked, appeared to be both extensive and elaborate.

We were conducted through several pillared halls, and then up a wide staircase, of somewhat sombre magnifi-

cence, into the chamber, where the company were already in part assembled, and busy in offering their congratulations to the mistress of the feast. She was so much engaged with their flatteries that she did not at first perceive our entrance ; but as soon as she knew who had come, the chief part of her attention was devoted, I shall not say in what proportions, between her victorious advocate and his blushing son. Nevertheless, the kinsman of Licinius and the companion of young Sextus had no occasion to accuse the fair lady of negligence, although he was not quite so vain as to imagine that he owed all her civilities to the favourable impression of his own figure and address.

To me the whole scene was of course perfectly novel — to you, could you behold it at this moment, it would, I am sure, be almost equally so ; for rapidly as we have been advancing in our imitation of the manners of the capital, our island most unquestionably has never yet displayed any thing that could sustain the smallest comparison with what then met my eyes in the stately saloon of this luxurious widow. The group around her was gay and various, and she herself was exquisitely worthy of forming its centre ; for she was young and handsome, and dressed in a style of the utmost splendour, and her deportment was equally elegant and vivacious.

Her complexion was of that clear rich brown which lends to the eye a greater brilliancy than the most exquisite contrast of red and white ; and over which the blood, when it does come into the face, diffuses at once the warmest and the deepest of blushes. Her hair appeared to be perfectly black, unless where the light streaming from behind her gave an edging of glossy brown to the thick masses of her curls. Her robe of crimson silk was fastened by a girdle, which seemed to consist of nothing but rubies and emeralds, strung upon threads of gold. She wore a tiara that rose high above her tresses, and was all over resplendent with flowers woven in jewelry ; and around her delicate wrists and ankles were twined broad chains of virgin gold, interspersed with alternate wreaths of sapphire. Her form was the perfection of luxury ; and although I have said

that her deportment was in general lively and brilliant, yet there was a soft seriousness that every now and then settled in her eyes which gave her for a moment a look of melancholy that seemed to me more likely to be in harmony with the secret nature of her disposition. I watched her in particular when she spoke to Sextus: her full rich-toned voice was then merry, and her large eyes sparkled; but when she was engaged with any other person she could not help gazing on the beautiful youth in silence; and then it was that her countenance wore its deepest expression of calmness—I had almost said, of sadness.

Had I not spent the preceding day at the villa of Capito, I dare say I should have wondered at the coldness with which Sextus appeared to receive all the marks of her favour; and as it was, I could not help contemplating this fair creature with a mixture of admiration and pity,—emotions, one of which was, I doubt not, partaken by all present—the other was probably confined to myself. I had been gazing on her in this manner I know not how long, from another part of the room, when I heard a hearty chuckle from behind me, and thought I could not be unacquainted with the voice. Looking round, I saw, not without delight, the stately figure of my Prætorian captain, Sabinus, whose cheerful eye soon distinguished me, and who forthwith came up to salute me in the most friendly manner. I introduced him to Licinius and Sextus, the former of whom expressed himself as being much gratified with the attention the centurion had shown to me during our voyage; so that I felt myself, as it were, no longer a stranger in the place; and the lutes and trumpets at that moment announcing that supper was ready to be served up, I took care to keep close to Sabinus, and to place myself near him on the couch.

The room in which the feast was prepared communicated by a pair of brazen folding-doors, richly sculptured, with that in which the company had assembled; but from it, although the sun had not yet gone down, all light was excluded, excepting what streamed from golden candelabra and broad lamps of bronze suspended overhead from the high and painted ceiling. The party might con-

sist of about twenty, who reclined along one semicircular couch, the covers of which were of the softest down and the frame-work inlaid with ivory,—the part of the room enclosed by its outline, which resembled that of a horse-shoe, being occupied with the table, an open space, to which the attendants had free access. We had no sooner taken our seats than a crowd of slaves entered carrying large boards upon their heads, which being forthwith arranged on the table, were seen to be loaded with dishes of gold and silver and all manner of drinking vessels, also with vases of rare flowers, and urns of perfume. But how did the countenance of Sabinus brighten when the trumpet sounded a second time, as if from below, and the floor of the chamber was suddenly, as it were, pierced in twain, and the pealing music ushered up a huge roasted boar, all wreathed with stately garnishings, and standing erect on his golden platform as on a chariot of triumph!

“Ah! my dear boy,” cries he, “here comes the true king of beasts, and only legitimate monarch of the woods. What should we not have given for a slice of him when we were pent up, half-starved and fainting, in that abominable ship of ours! All hail, most potent conqueror! but whether Germanic or Asiatic be thy proper title I shall soon know, when that expert Ethiopian has daintily carved and divided thee.”

But why should I attempt to describe to you the particulars of the feast? Let it suffice, that whatever idea I had formed of Roman luxury was far surpassed, and that the splendour of the entertainment engaged the attention of all except Rubellia herself, who, reclining immediately above Sextus, kept her eyes fixed almost all the time it lasted upon his luxuriant curls of dark hair, unless when she caused the young damsel her cup-bearer to pour out to her wine in a goblet of onyx, which she touched with her lips and then handed to the indifferent boy. When the supper was half over the folding-doors were again thrown open, and there entered a group of maidens and beautiful youths, who danced before us to the music of the lute, and scattered crowns of roses at the feet of Rubellia and her guests. She herself placed one of them on

the head of Sextus, and another on that of his father, who lay on the other side of her, and then caused a large cup of wine to be carried all around, whereof each of us tasted, and drank to the health of the orator, in whose honour the entertainment was made. The ladies that were present imitated the example of the hostess, and crowned such as were by them; but Sabinus and I, not being near enough to any of them, received that courtesy from some of the dancing maidens. Libations were poured out abundantly on the marble floor, and all the gods were invoked to shower down their blessings on Rubellia and those that had been so fortunate as to serve her. Sweet strains of music resounded through the tall pillars of the banqueting-room, and the lamps burned heavily in an atmosphere overloaded with perfumes.

It appeared to me from the beginning that my friend Sabinus witnessed, not without some feelings of displeasure, the excessive attentions which Rubellia lavished on young Sextus; and I gathered, from the way in which he every now and then looked towards them during the supper, that, had the place permitted, he would not have allowed such things to go on without some comment. But when we had left the banqueting-room and removed to another apartment, where, amid various entertainments of dancing, music, and recitation, Rubellia still retained close to herself the heir of Licinius, the centurion made to himself abundant amends for the previous restraint to which his temper had been subjected.

"Confess now," said he, "that she is a lovely creature, and that your British beauties are tame and insipid when compared with such a specimen of Roman fascination; and confess, withal, that this curled boy is either the most ignorant or the most insusceptible of his sex. Good Heavens! in what a different style was she treated by that old magistrate whose very bust there in the corner looks quite blank and disconsolate with its great white eyes, while she, that sat for so many months pale and weeping by his bedside, is thinking of nothing but to bestow all the wealth he left her on a beardless stripling, who appears to regard the bust and the beauty with almost equal indifference. Alas! poor old withered

Leberinus, little did you imagine that so small a vial would suffice to hold all her tears. My only wonder is, that she still permits your marble image to occupy even a corner of her mansion ; but no doubt you will soon be sent on your travels. I dare say some cold pedestal in the garden will, ere long, be the best berth you need look for. Well, well, you see what fools we may all be made by the cunning of these pretty crocodiles. Thank the stars, I have, as yet at least, escaped that worst of all calamities. I hope my dotage, when it does come, will not show itself in the same shape with that of my good old friend. Had she wished to marry some respectable man, who might be a protection to her and her money, one might have thought less of the matter ; but this is really too much. I hope the ghost of the worthy prætor will not frown unseen by her bedside the night she takes this Adonis to her arms. If I were in his place I should give her curtains a pretty shake. By Hermes ! it would not be a pretty monument and a flowery epitaph that would make me lie still."

"How long is it," said I, "since this venerable magistrate died ? Surely she has allowed him the decency of a twelvemonth's grief, before she began to give fine suppers, and perceive the beauty of Sextus ?"

"Whether it be a twelvemonth ago or not," replied the centurion, "is more than I can take upon me to decide ; all I know is, that it appears to me as if it were but yesterday that I supped here (it was just before I set off for Britain), and saw the young lady reclining, even at table, with those long black curls of hers in the bosom of the emaciated Leberinus. By Jupiter ! the old man would not taste a drop of wine unless she kissed the cup—she coaxed every morsel he swallowed down his throat, and clasped the garland round his bald pate with her own fingers ; ay, twice before that sleek physician, that solemn-faced Greek, whom you see at this moment talking with your kinsman, advised her to have him carried to his bed. For all the gravity of his looks, I would lay a trifle that worthy Bœotian has his own thoughts about what is passing as well as I. But the worst-pleased face in the whole room is, I think, that of old Rubellius himself yon-

der, who has just come in, without I suppose being aware that any such feast as this was going forward. Without question, the crafty old usurer is of opinion he might have been invited. I promise you I can interpret the glances of that gray-headed extortioner to a nicety—(well I may, for it is not the first time I have had an opportunity of studying them). Well, well," quoth he to himself, "she may do as she will with the bonds of Leberinus; but she might have remembered that a codicil can be easily tacked to the end of a living man's testament."

"But, after all," said I, "one must admit, that if she married old Leberinus to please her father, the widow has some right to choose her second husband according to the pattern of her own fancy."

"Oh! by all means," answered he; "let her please herself; let her make a fool of herself now, if she will. She may perhaps learn, some time or other, that it is as possible to have too young a husband as to have too old a one."

"Come now, Sabinus," said I, (for the bitterness with which he spoke convinced me what was at the bottom of his mind), "confess that if she had selected some well-made, middle-aged man—some respectable man—some man of note and distinction, you would have judged less harshly of poor Rubellia; some good-looking captain of Prætorians, we shall say."

"Ah! you cunning dog," said he; "who would have thought that you had brought so much wickedness from that new world of yours? But do you really think she will wed Sextus? The boy appears strangely cold. I should not wonder, when all is done, if the match were more of the orator's seeking than his own."

"I can only tell you," said I, "that I have never heard Licinius mention any thing about it; and I dare say Sextus would be very sorry to think of losing his liberty for the sake of the wealth of Leberinus—ay, or for that of old Rubellius to boot."

"Ah! my young friend," quoth he, "you are not quite acquainted with the way in which these matters are managed at Rome. If we had you six weeks at the other side of the Viminal we should teach you better."

I know not how long this sort of talk might have lasted; but Licinius put an end to it by joining us, and soon engaged the worthy centurion and several more of us with some lively but unintelligible discussion on the merits of some new edict, of which none of us had ever heard, or were likely ever to hear any thing again. We were glad to escape from the lawyer into another room, where some Greek slaves were performing a sort of comic pantomime that appeared to give more delight to old Rubellius than any other of the spectators. As for Sextus, I saw plainly that he was quite weary of the entertainment, and anxious to get away; but we were obliged to remain till after Licinius was gone, for it was evident that he wished his son to see out the last. But no sooner had we heard his chariot drive off, than the young man and I took leave of the lady, and withdrew. Sabinus lingered a moment behind us, and then joined us in the vestibule, from which, his course lying so far in the same direction as ours, we all proceeded homewards on foot; and it was very fortunate, as you shall hear, that we had on this occasion the company of the centurion, for not a few things occurred that night which I should have been sorry not to have observed, and of which, but for him, it would nevertheless have been impossible for me to have been witness.

We had proceeded along the street of the Suburra for a considerable space, and were already beneath the shade of the great temple of Isis and Serapis (which stands on the northern side of the Esquiline Hill, nigh over-against the Amphitheatre of Vespasian), when, from the opposite side of the way, we were hailed by a small party of soldiers, who, as it turned out, had been sent from the Prætorian camp in search of Sabinus, and one of whom had now recognised his gait and stature, notwithstanding the obscurity of the hour and the distance at which we were walking. The centurion went aside with the leader of these men for some moments, and then informed us that it was very fortunate they had so easily recognised him, as the business on which they had been sent was such as did not admit of being negligently dealt with. "Tomorrow," said he, pointing to the amphitheatre before us, "that glorious edifice is to be the scene of one of the

grandest shows exhibited by Trajan since his accession to the empire. It is the anniversary of the day on which he was adopted by Nerva, and the splendour of the spectacle will be in proportion to the gratitude and veneration with which he at all times regards the memory of that excellent benefactor. But there are some parts of the exhibition that I am afraid old Nerva, could he be present to behold them, would not regard with the same feelings as his successor."

"Surely," said I, "the beneficent Trajan will not stain the expression of his gratitude by any thing unworthy of himself, or that could give displeasure to Nerva?"

"Nay," replied the centurion, "it is not for me to talk about any thing that Trajan chooses to do being unworthy of Trajan; but you well know that Nerva would never suffer any of the Christians to be molested during his reign, and now here are some of these unhappy fanatics, that are to be compelled either to renounce their faith in the face of the assembly to-morrow, or to die on the arena. It is to inspect the condition of these unfortunates, who, I know not for what reason, are confined in a dungeon below the ramparts in the vicinity of our camp, and to announce to them the final determination of their fate, that I, as centurion of the night, have now been summoned. If you are curious to see the men, you are at liberty to go along with me, and I shall be greatly obliged to you for your company to boot."

My curiosity having been considerably excited in regard to the new faith and its adherents, in consequence of certain circumstances, some of which I have already narrated, I was very desirous to accept of this offer. Nor did Sextus any sooner perceive that such was my inclination than he advised me to gratify it, undertaking, at the same time, himself to go straight homewards, and satisfy his father, in case of any inquiry, that I was in a place of safety, and under the protection of Sabinus. With him therefore, and with his Prætorians, I proceeded along various streets which led us by the skirts of the Esquiline and Viminal Hills, on to the region of the Mounds of Tarquin, over-against which, as you have heard, the great camp of those bands is situated,—if indeed that

ought of right to be called by the name of a camp which is itself a city of no slender dimensions, and built with great splendour of architecture, spread out beyond the limits of Rome, for the accommodation of that proud soldiery. There my friend took me into his own chamber, and furnished me with a cloak and helmet, that I might excite no suspicion by accompanying him on his errand. The watch-word of the night also was given unto me, which, as I call to mind, was *silent faith*; and shortly issuing forth a second time, we came to the gate of the prison-house wherein the Christians were lying.

Now, when we had entered into the guard-room, we found it crowded with spearmen of Sabinus's band, some of whom were playing at dice, others carousing jovially, and many wrapped up in their mantles, and asleep upon the floor, while a few only were sitting beneath the porch with their spears in their hands, and leaning upon their bucklers. From one of the elder of these the centurion, after having drawn him aside out of the company, made inquiry straightway concerning the names and condition of the prisoners, and whether as yet they had received any intelligence of that which was to come to pass on the morrow. The soldier, who was a grave man and well stricken in years, made answer, "that of a surety the men were free-born and of decent estate, and that he had not heard of any thing else being laid to their charge, excepting that which concerned their religion. Since they have been here," he continued, "I have been several times set on watch over them, and twice have I lain with one of them in his dungeon: yet have I heard no complaints from any of them, for in all things they are patient. One of them only is to suffer to-morrow—but for him I am especially concerned, for he was known to me of old, having served often with me when I was a horseman in the army of Titus, all through the war of Palestine, and at the siege of Jerusalem."

"And of what country is he?" said Sabinus. "Is he also a Roman?"

"No, sir," answered the spearman, "he is no Roman; but he was of a troop of the allies that was joined oftentimes to our legion, and I have seen him bear himself on

the day of battle as well as any Roman of us all. He is by birth a Greek of the seacoast ; but his mother was of the nation of the Jews, and he was brought up from his youth according to their law."

"And yet, although the son of a Jewess, he was with us, say you, at the siege of Jerusalem?"

"Even so," replied the man ; "and not he only, but many others ; for the Jews, you know, were divided against themselves ; and of all them that were Christians, it was said that not one abode in the city, or gave help to defend it. For, as this man himself hath sworn to me, the oracles of the Christians, and their prophets, had of old given warning that the city must fall into the hands of Cæsar, by reason of the wickedness of that people. Wherefore, when we set our camp over-against Jerusalem, these men all passed out from the city, with their wives and their children, and dwelt safely in the mountainous country, until all things were fulfilled. But some of these young men fought in our camp, and did good service, because the place was known to them, and they had acquaintance with all the secrets of the Rock. Of these, this man was one. He and all his household had departed from the ancient religion of the Jews, and were believers in the doctrines of the Christians, for which cause he is to suffer on the morrow ; and of that, although I have not spoken to him this evening, I think he has already received some intelligence, for certain of his friends passed in to him, and they covered their faces as they went in, as if weeping."

"Are these friends still with him?" said Sabinus.

"Yes," answered he, "for I must have seen them had they come forth again. Without doubt, the two women are still with him in his dungeon."

"Women?" quoth Sabinus ; "and of what condition think you they may be?"

"That I know not," replied the soldier ; "for, as I have said, they walked in muffled in their mantles. But one of them, at least, is a Roman, for I heard her speak to him that is by the door of the dungeon."

"How long is it," said the centurion, "since they went into this prison?"

"More than an hour," replied the soldier, looking at the water-clock that stood beneath the porch; "and if they be Christians, they are not yet about to depart, for they never separate without singing together, which is their favourite manner of worship."

He had scarcely uttered these words, when the soldiers that were carousing within the guard-room became silent, and we heard the voices of those that were in the dungeon singing together in a sweet and lowly manner.

"Ah, sir!" said the old soldier, "I thought it would be even so; there is not a spearman in the band that would not willingly watch here a whole night, could he be sure of hearing that melody. Well do I know that soft voice—Hear now, how she sings by herself—and there again, that deep strong note—that is the voice of the prisoner."

"Hush!" quoth the centurion; "heard you ever any thing half so divine? Are these words Greek or Syrian?"

"What the words are I know not," said the soldier; "but I know the tune well; I have heard it played many a night with hautboy, and clarion, and dulcimer, on the high walls of Jerusalem, while the old city was beleaguered."

"It is some old Jewish tune then," said Sabinus; "I knew not those barbarians had had half so much art."

"Why, as for that, sir," replied the man, "I have been all over Greece and Egypt—to say nothing of Italy—and I never heard any music like that music of the Jews. Why, when they came down to join the battle, their trumpets sounded so gloriously that we wondered how it was possible for them ever to be driven back; and then, when their gates were closed, and they sent out to beg their dead, they would play such solemn awful notes of lamentation that the plunderers stood still to listen, and their warriors were delivered to them with all their mail as they had fallen."

"And the Christians also," said Sabinus, "had the same tunes?"

"Oh yes, sir—why; for that matter, these very tunes may have been among them, for aught we know, since the beginning of their nation. I have stood sentinel with this very man, and seen the tears run down his cheeks by the

starlight, when he heard the music from the city, as the Jewish captains were going their rounds upon the battlements."

"But this, surely," said the centurion, "is no warlike melody."

"I know not," quoth the old soldier, "whether it be or not—but I am sure it sounds not like any music of sorrow,—and yet, what plaintive tones are in the part of that female voice!"

"The bass sounds triumphantly, in good sooth."

"Ay, sir, but that is the old man's own voice—I am sure he will keep a good heart to the end, even though they should be singing their farewell to him. Well, the emperor loses a good soldier the hour old Thraso dies. I wish to Jupiter he had not been a Christian, or had kept his religion to himself. But as for changing now, you might as well think of persuading the prince himself to be a Jew, as talk to Thraso about that."

"That last high strain, however," quoth Sabinus, "has ended their singing. Let us speak to the women as they come out; and if it be so that the man is already aware of what is to be done to-morrow, I see not why we should trouble him with entering his cell. He has but a few hours to live, and I would not willingly disturb him."

"I hear them coming," said the soldier.

"Then do you meet them," said Sabinus, "and tell them that the centurion wishes to speak to them ere they go away—we will retire some space, and talk to them out of hearing of the guard."

With that he and I withdrew to the other side of the way, over-against the door of the prison; and we stood there waiting for the women under a certain old fig-tree, that grew close by the city wall. In a few minutes two persons, arrayed even as the soldier had described, drew near to us; and one of them, without uncovering her countenance, said,—“Master, we trust we have done no evil in visiting the prisoners; had it been so, surely we should not have been permitted to enter without question or difficulty proposed.”

These words were spoken in a voice tremulous and agitated, as if with grief rather than with terror; but I

could not help starting when I heard them, for there were one or two tones in the voice that I thought I could not be mistaken in believing I had heard before ; however, I commanded myself, and heard in silence what Sabinus replied to the women.

"Be not alarmed," said he ; "there is no offence committed, for no orders have been issued to prevent these men from seeing their friends. I sent for you, not to find fault with what you have done, but only to ask whether this prisoner has already been told that the emperor has announced his resolution concerning him, and that he must die to-morrow, in the Amphitheatre of Vespasian, unless he renounce his superstition."

"He knows all," answered the same voice ; "and is prepared for all things but dishonour."

"By heavens ! Valerius," whispered Sabinus, "it is no mean person that speaks so—this is the voice and the gesture of a Roman lady." Then raising his voice, "In that case there is no need for my going into the dungeon ; and yet, could I hope to say any thing that might tend to make him change his purpose, I would most gladly do so. The emperor is as humane as he is just, and unless when rebellious obstinacy shuts the gates of mercy, he is the last that would consent to the shedding of any blood. For this man, of whose history I have just been hearing something, I am in a particular manner interested, and to save him, I wish only I had power equal to my inclination. It is Thraso of whom I speak—Is there no chance of convincing him ?"

"He is already convinced," replied the voice, "and no one can move him. Thraso will die in honour, as he has lived in honour."

"Could his friends do nothing to bend him ?"

"His friends have been with him already," said the voice, again becoming every moment more clear and steadfast ; "but they were poor friends that would seek to save the body of Thraso at the expense of the soul of Thraso."

This last sentence was spoken so distinctly, that I knew I could no longer be mistaken ; and I was on the brink of speaking out, without thinking of the consequences that

might possibly occur, when she that had spoken, after appearing to regard me steadily through her veil, uttered a faint cry, and dropping on her knees before Sabinus, said, "Oh, sir! to us also be merciful, and let us go hence ere any one behold us!"

"Go in peace, lady," answered the centurion, "and henceforth be prudent as well as kind;" and they went away from us, and were soon lost to our sight in the windings of the street. We stood there for some moments in silence, looking towards the place where they disappeared. "Strange superstition," said Sabinus; "what heroism dwells with this madness!—you see how little these men regard ~~their~~ lives;—nay, even women, and Roman women too—you see how their nature is changed by it."

"It is, indeed, a most strange spectacle," said I; "but what is to be the end of it, if this spirit become diffused widely among the people?"

"In truth I know not," answered the centurion: "but many have already died from this cause, and yet we have heard of none who had once embraced this faith renouncing it out of fear for their lives."

"And in the days of Nero and Domitian," said I, "were not many hundreds of them punished even here in the capital?"

"You are far, very far within the mark, Valerius," said he, "when you speak of hundreds; and not a few of those that were sent into exile in those days, because of their Christianity, were, as you may have heard, of no ordinary condition. Among these there were Flavius Clemens, the consular, and his wife Domitilla; both of whom I have often seen in my youth—both relations to the family of Vespasian—whom, notwithstanding, all the splendour of the imperial blood could not save from the common fate of their sect. But Nerva suffered all of them to live in peace, and recalled such as were in exile, excepting only Domitilla, whose fate has been regretted by all men; but I suppose it was not at first judged safe to recall her, lest any tumult should have been excited in her name, by those that regretted (and I am sorry to say these were not a few) the wicked license of which they had been deprived by the death of her tyrannical kinsman, and the

transition of the imperial dignity into another line. She also with whom we have been speaking is, I am sure, a Roman lady of condition ; and you may judge of her zeal, when you see that it brings her hither at midnight, to mingle tears and prayers with those of an old legionary, such as this Thraso. Did you observe that the other female both walked and stood behind her. You may depend upon it that was her slave or freed woman."

"I observed all this," answered I. But little did Sabinus suspect that I had observed so much more than himself had done. Little did he know with what emotions I had listened to all that had been said. He had never seen Athanasia, nor could he read my secret thoughts, to understand with what feelings I had learned that Athanasia was a Christian. Before parting from him, I said I should still be gratified with being permitted to see Thraso ; and although he declined entering himself, he accordingly gave command that the door of his dungeon should be opened for me, requesting me, at the same time, to refrain from saying any thing more to the man than was necessary for explaining the apparent purpose of my visit—the communication, namely, of the fate that was reserved for him and his companions on the morrow.

So saying, the centurion withdrew to the camp ; and the same old spearman with whom he had conversed at the porch carried a torch in his hand, and showed me the way into the dungeon of the prisoner.

CHAPTER X.

BETWEEN the first door, whereof the soldier relaxed the heavy bolts, and the second, which appeared to be almost entirely formed of iron, there intervened a short space, which was occupied by a few broad steps of old and very massive mason-work ; and upon the lowest of these steps I stood waiting till he should open the second door. It was some time before he accomplished this, for

several keys were applied before he discovered the right one; but at last the lock turned, and the heavy door swung away from before him so speedily that the air, rushing out of the vault, extinguished in a moment the flame of the torch; insomuch, that we had no light excepting that which streamed from an aperture high up in the wall of the dungeon itself; a feeble ray of starlight alone—for the moon had long ere this time been gone down, which, nevertheless, sufficed to show us to the prisoner, although we at first could see nothing of him.

"Soldiers," said the old man, in a voice of perfect calmness, "for what reason are you come?"

"We come," said my companion, "by command of the centurion, to inform you of things which we would willingly not have to tell—to-morrow Trajan opens the Amphitheatre of Vespasian."

"My old comrade," said the prisoner, interrupting him, "is it your voice I hear? I know all this already; and you know of old that I fear not the face of death."

"Alas! Thraso, I know well you fear not death; yet why, when there is no need, should you cast away life? Think well, I beseech you, and reserve yourself for a better day."

"The dawn of that better day, Romans, already begins to open upon my eyes. I see the east red with the promise of its brightness. Would you have me tarry in darkness, when I am invited to walk forth into the light?"

"Thraso, your words rejoice me," answered the spearman; "and I am sure all will rejoice in hearing that you have at length come to think thus—Trajan himself will rejoice. You have but to say the word, and you are free."

"You mean kindly," said the old man, rising from his pallet, and walking towards us as far as his fetters permitted; "you mean kindly, therefore I blame you not. But you are much mistaken—I have but to keep silence, and I am free."

"Alas! Thraso, what mean you? Do you know what you say? You must worship the gods in the morning, else you die."

"Evening and morning, and for ever, I must worship

the God that made heaven and the earth. If I bow down to the idols of Trajan, I buy the life of a day at the price of death everlasting. Tempt me not in your kindness: I fell once. Great God, preserve me from falling! I have bid farewell to my friends already. Leave me to spend these few hours by myself—leave me to prepare the flesh for that from which the spirit shrinks not." So saying, he extended his hand to the spearman, and the two old men embraced each other tenderly before me.

"Prisoner," said I, "if there be any thing in which we can serve you, command our aid: we have already done our duty to the centurion; if, without transgressing that, we can do any thing that may give ease to your mind now, or, after you are gone, comfort to your kindred, you have but to speak."

"Sir," replied he, "I see by the eagle wings on your helmet that you are one in authority, and I hear by your voice that you are young. There is a certain thing concerning which I had some purpose to speak to this my old brother in arms; but if I may rely on that which you have said, without question your power is greater to execute that which I desire."

"Speak with confidence," said I; "although I am a Roman, and bear all loyalty to the prince, yet this Prætorian helmet is not mine, and I have but assumed it for the sake of having access to your prison. I am no soldier of Trajan: whatever I can do for you without harm to others, speak, and I will do it. I will swear to you—"

"Nay, sir," said he, "swear not—mock not the God of heaven by invoking idol or demon—I believe your word; but there is no need why any other should be witness to my request."

"I will retire," said the spearman, "and keep watch at the door; surely there is no need for me to say that whatever I might hear should be safe within me. But I am no more than a poor spearman, and this young patrician can do much more than I. Let him alone hear and execute your commands."

"Be it so," said the prisoner, a second time embracing him; "I would not willingly expose you to any needless

danger ; and yet I see not what danger there is in all that I have to ask."

With this the old spearman withdrew ; and being left alone with Thraso, I took his hand, and sitting down beside him on his pallet, shortly explained to him the circumstances under which I had come thither.

"Young sir," said he, "I know not what is about the sound of your voice, and the frankness of your demeanour, that makes me feel confidence enough to intrust you with a certain thing, which concerns not myself, nor any hope of mine, for that were little—but the interests of one that is far dearer to me than I can express, and who, I hope, will live many happy days upon earth, after I shall have sealed my belief in the message of God by blood that has of old been exposed a thousand times to all mortal perils, for the sake of things whereof I have long perceived the worthlessness. But a very short while ago, and I might have executed this thing for myself ; but weakness overcame me at the moment of parting, and I forgot till it was too late."

"If it be any thing which you would have me convey to any one, say where I may find the person," I said, "and be assured I shall deliver it in safety."

"Sir," he proceeded, "it is even so ; I have here with me certain writings, which I have carried for these twenty years continually in my bosom. Among these is one of the sacred books of the faith for which I am to die, and I would fain have it placed in the hands of one to whom I know it will be dearest of all, for the sake of that which it contains ; but, I hope dear also for the sake of him that bequeaths it. Will you seek out a certain Roman lady, and undertake to give into her own hands, in secret, the scroll which I shall give you ?"

"I will do my endeavour," said I ; "and if I cannot find means to execute your command, I shall destroy the book with my own hands before I quit Rome—for my stay here is uncertain."

"If you cannot find means to do what I ask safely," he replied, "I do not bid you destroy the book—that is yours, to do with as it shall seem good to you—but I conjure you to read it before you throw it away. Nay, even

as it is, I conjure you to read it before you seek to give it to her whose name I shall mention."

"Old man," said I, "almost I believe that I already know her name, and more besides. If it be so that I have conjectured aright, be assured that all you ask shall be fulfilled to the letter; be assured also, that I would die with you to-morrow, rather than live to be the cause or instrument of any evil thing to her that but now visited you in your dungeon."

"Alas!" cried the old man, starting up, "lay not this also, Oh Lord! upon my head. Let the old bear witness—but let the young be spared, to serve thee in happier years upon the earth!"

"Be not afraid," said I; "if it was Athanasia, no one suspected it but myself; and I have already told you that I would die rather than bring evil upon her head."

"Yes," he answered, after a pause—"it was, indeed, Athanasia. Yes, young man, who is it but she that would have left the halls of nobles, and the couches of peace, to breathe at midnight the air of a dungeon, that she might solace the last moments of a poor man, and, save the bond of Christ, of a stranger! But if you have known her before, and spoken with her before, then surely she must indeed be safe in your hands. You know where she dwells—that I myself know not. Here is the scroll, from which that noble maiden has heard my humble voice essay to expound the words of eternal life. I charge you to approach her with reverence, and give into her own hands my dying bequest; yet, as I have said, deliver it not to her till you have yourself read what it contains."

"Christian," said I, placing the writing in my bosom, "have no fear—I will read your book, and ere two nights have gone over my head, I shall find means to place it in the hands of Athanasia; and now, farewell."

"Nay, not yet, for the last time. Will you not come in the morning and behold the death of a Christian?"

"Alas!" said I, "what will it avail that I should torture myself with looking on the shedding of your blood? The prince may have reason to regard you as an offender against the state; but I have spoken with you in your solitude, and I know that your heart is noble. Would to

heaven, that by going thither I could avert your fate ! but that is in your own hands, and though die you will, why should I see you die ?”

“Methinks, sir,” he replied, “it may be weakness ; but yet methinks it would give me some further comfort in my death to know that there was at least one Roman there who would not see me die without pity ; and besides, I must have you constrain yourself, that you may be able to carry the tidings of my departure to her of whom we have spoken. Her prayers will be with me, but not her eyes. You must tell Athanasia the manner of my death.”

“For that cause,” said I, “I will constrain myself, and be present in the amphitheatre.”

“Then, farewell,” said he ; “and yet go not. In whatsoever faith you live, in whatsoever faith you die, the blessing of an old man and a Christian can do you no harm.” So saying, the old man stood up, and leaning his hand on my head as I sat, pronounced over me a blessing which I never shall forget. “The Lord bless thee—the Lord enlighten thy darkness—the Lord plant his seed in thy kind heart—the Lord give thee also to die the death of a Christian !”

When he had said so, he sat down again ; and I departed greatly oppressed in spirit, yet feeling, I know not how or why, as I would rather have lost many merry days than that dark and sorrowful hour in the prison of this old man. The soldiers in the guard-room were so much engaged in their different occupations, that they heeded me not as I stepped silently to the gate ; and I was soon out of sight of their flaming watch-fires, and far from the sounds of that noisy mirth of theirs, which contrasted so strangely with the mournful silence of the dungeon I had quitted.

There was something in the total silence of the proud Roman streets—in their dreary and heavy desertedness—that accorded far better with the feelings of my mind as I walked along ; and I ruminated on all that I had seen and heard, without being disturbed by any sight or sound of life, or the excitation of life. Wherever there is shadow there is also brightness ; but the uniform face of

the gray twilight admits of no bold contrasts of the deep and the dazzling; and it is then that the mind also can best array itself in the calm sobriety of contemplation. It was not, indeed, the first time that I had thought of death; but it was the first time that I had been in the presence of a human being foreseeing distinctly, and quietly awaiting, the termination of his mortal existence; and I could not help asking of myself, with a certain fearful anxiety, how, under similar circumstances of terror, I should have myself been able to sustain my spirits; to what resources I should, in such a moment, look for the support which seemed to have been vouchsafed so abundantly to this old man; by what charm, in fine—by what tenet of philosophy, or by what hope of religion, I should in the midst of life be able to reconcile myself to a voluntary embrace of death. To avoid disgrace, indeed, and dishonour, said I, I think I could be Roman enough to dare the worst; but this poor man is willing to die rather than acknowledge, by one offering on the altar, the deities in whose worship all his Greek ancestors have been trained; yet who, except perhaps a few obscure individuals that have adopted the same new superstition, would think this man dishonoured by returning to the religion of his fathers? Deep indeed must be his conviction of the truth of that which he professes to believe; serious indeed must be his faith, and high his trust. I could not help sometimes thinking to myself, what if, after all, his faith should be true and his trust wise! The thoughts of the gentle Athanasia, too, were not unmingled with my meditations concerning the heroic demeanour of Thraso; and I felt within myself some obscure presentiment, that from her lips I should yet receive explanation of all, which at that moment appeared to me to be so much enveloped in mystery.

Musing and meditating thus, it was no wonder that I, who knew so little of Rome, should have soon wandered from the straight way to the home of my kinsman. In truth, but that I at last caught at the turning of a street a glimpse of the Flavian Amphitheatre, which I had before passed on my way from the feast of Rubellia—and of which I had been hearing and thinking so much during my

visit to the quarters of the Prtæorians—I might, perhaps, have been long enough of discovering whereabouts I was. I had a pretty accurate notion of the way from that grand edifice to the house of Licinius, and therefore moved towards it immediately, intending to pass straight down from thence into the Sacred Way. But when I came close to the amphitheatre, I found that, surrounded on all sides by a city of sleep and silence, that region was already filled with all manner of noise and tumult, in consequence of the preparations which had begun to be made for the spectacles of the succeeding day. The east was just beginning to be streaked with the first faint blushes of morning; but the torches and innumerable lanterns, in the hands of the different workmen and artificers employed there, threw more light than was sufficient to give me an idea of all that was going forward. On one side, the whole way was blocked up with a countless throng of wagons: the conductors of which, almost all of them Ethiopians and Numidians, were lashing each other's horses, and exchanging, in their barbarous tongues, violent outcries of, I doubt not, more barbarous wrath and execration. The fearful bellowings that resounded from any of the wagons which happened to be set in motion amid the choking throng intimated that savage beasts were confined within them; and when I had discovered this, and then regarded the prodigious multitude of the wagons, I cannot say what horror came over me at thinking what cruel sights, and how lavish in cruelty, were become the favourite pastimes of the most refined of people. I recognised the well-known short deep snort of the wild-boar, and the long hollow bark of the wolf; but a thousand fierce sounds, mingled with these, were equally new and terrific to my ears. One voice, however, was so grand in its notes of sullen rage, that I could not help asking a soldier, who sat on horseback near me, from what wild beast it proceeded. The man answered that it was a lion; but then what laughter arose among some of the rabble, that had overheard my interrogation; and what contemptuous looks were thrown upon me by the naked negroes, who sat grinning in the torch-light, on the tops of their carriages! Then one or two of the soldiers

would be compelled to ride into the midst of the confusion, to separate some of these wretches, fighting with their whips about precedence in the approaching entrance to the amphitheatre; and then it seemed to me that the horses could not away with the strong sickly smell of some of the beasts that were carried there, for they would prance and caper, and rear on end, and snort as if panic-struck, and dart themselves towards the other side; while some of the riders were thrown off in the midst of the tumult, and others, with fierce and strong bits, compelled the frightened or infuriated animals to endure the thing they abhorred—in their wrath and pride, forcing them even nearer than was necessary to the hated wagons. In another quarter, this close-mingled pile of carts and horses was surmounted by the enormous heads of elephants, thrust high up into the air, some of them with their huge lithe trunks lashing and beating (for they too, as you have heard, would rather die than snuff in the breath of these monsters of the woods), while the tiara'd heads of their leaders would be seen tossed to and fro by the contortions of those high necks, whereon for the most part they had their sitting-places. There was such a cry of cursing, and such a sound of whips and cords, and such blowing of horns, and whistling and screaming, and all this mixed with such roaring, and bellowing, and howling from the savage creatures within the caged wagons, that I stood, as it were, aghast and terrified, by reason of the tumult that was round about me.

I went in, however, for a moment, to the amphitheatre itself, by a little side-way, admission to which was afforded to me in return for a few pence. Here, as yet, all things were in order, for the hour had not yet come for giving the wild beasts entrance to the several huge dens, or cages, prepared for them along one side of the arena. A few carpenters only were seen in one corner, erecting a sort of low stage, and singing merrily at their work, of whom I made inquiry concerning the purpose of that which they were setting up; whereupon one of these fellows also began to jeer and to laugh, saying, "Whence come you, good sir, that you do not know a common scaffold when you see it? It is surely not the first time that

a Christian has had his head chopped off in this amphitheatre."

"By Pluto, I am not so sure about that matter," quoth another. "I don't know whether any of the dogs were ever beheaded here or not; if they have been, I can only say it was better than they deserved."

"There spoke a true man," cries a third. "I say with the old Flavian boys, that beheading is too pretty a death for a Jew, any day of the year. No, no; keep beheading for Romans—let citizens have their own. Things are come to a pretty pass nowadays, when they show us nothing but lions against lions, and tigers against tigers. By Jove, I would rather see one of those misbelieving atheists set right before the mouth of a true Getulian lion's cage, and hear his bones cracked ere all be over,—I say, I would rather see that, than fifty of your mere beast-fights."

"After all," rejoined the first, "it must be allowed that Domitian had a fine eye for the amphitheatre."

"Who doubts it?" says the other. "Rome has never seen any thing that deserved to be called a show since he was killed by that low pack of sneaking traitors. They say Nero was still better at that sort of work; but 'let the skinless Jew believe,' as the saying is, seeing is believing with me. I desire to see no better sport than poor Domitian gave us the very week before his death. We shall never live to see his like again!"

"Come, boys," rejoins one of the rest; "don't speak so despairingly neither. I had begun to think that these *good princes*, as they call them, would never show us a bit of real sport again at all. Now, this is at least something. Slowly and surely, as they say. Who can tell what may follow? and besides, if the worst come to the worst, we shall still have lions against lions, tigers against tigers, Dacians against Dacians, and now and then a Jew or a Christian, or whatever you please to call him, exhibited *solus* on such a stage as this. Come, come, don't make matters worse than they are."

The coarse laughter of these men, and the cold heartlessness of their discourse, sickened my very soul; and I remember, as if it were but yesterday, the loathing with

which I turned from them. The filthy ruffians showed that they knew well enough I was displeased with them, and I half-regretted, as I strode away from them, the want of that Prætorian helmet, which I well knew would have effectually preserved me from the insolence of their mirth. Howbeit, I was too well pleased to gain a distance at which I could no longer be troubled with them, and walked with rapid steps along the wide streets, over the tall buildings of which the light of the morning was now beginning to shine red and broad; while the air, being agitated with a quick and strong breeze, refreshed my cheeks and temples as I moved onward whereof, indeed, I had need, being heated with the glare and noise from which I had escaped, and faint withal, after the manner of the young, from the want of sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

I WAS admitted into the house by Dromo, who seemed to have been looking out for me; for he opened the door almost before I had time to knock at it. He regarded me as I entered with a very cunning face; insomuch that I comprehended, without difficulty, he believed me to have spent the night in some scene of debauch; but he, nevertheless, attended me, without saying a word, into my chamber. He then assumed a countenance of great reflection, and advised me, with much appearance of friendly concern, to go to bed, even although I could not stay long there; "because," said he, "you will feel much fresher when you get up; and let me tell you, you must be up early, for I have already been with Licinius, who intends to send Sextus with a present to the fair Lady Rubellia immediately after breakfast; and you may be sure Sextus will insist on your company, for he can do nothing without you. Ah! had it not been for a certain pretty creature that I could name, the young gentleman would not, I am confident, have permitted you to be

going the rounds in this way by yourself. But I take it something amiss, and shall tell him so, that he did not depute me (who am not particularly enamoured of any young lady just at present) to go with you, and take care of your safety. I only wonder how you have got home so well, as it is."

"Indeed," said I, "good Dromo, I cannot help wondering a little at that part of it myself—for I have been all through the city, and lost my way half a dozen times over, and yet here you see I am."

"The more reason," quoth the slave, "that you should send some nice little offering to Mercury's temple over the way, in the morning—a few sesterces will be quite handsome—and if you have no objections I shall willingly take care of them for you. Mercury, as all men will tell you, is the great guardian of all that travel about in the dark; and besides, he is himself the patron of all love expeditions. But, to say the truth, you are not the only person that owes a gift to that shrine; for the worthy sage Xerophrastes—he, too, has been a night-traveller as well as you—and he has not yet come in. I have my doubts whether, when he does so, he will be as sober as you are—but I must take care to be at my post, and admit him in silence, for the time is not yet come to blow his private doings. Trust me, this is not the only vagary I have set down to his account—all in good time—all in good time. But what says my master Valerius touching the offering to the great god Hermes?"

I saw by the expression of the knave's face that it was necessary the sesterces should be forthcoming; though I had my doubts whether he would have been satisfied with seeing them intrusted to any other hands than his own.

"Here they are," said I, "my good Dromo; and remember, that although Mercury, among other things, is the god of thieves also, he will not be well pleased if you curtail his offering."

"Never mind," answered the varlet, as he was shuffling out of the room, "never mind—Mercury and I understand each other of old. Go you to bed, and try to get a little of your own old British red into your cheeks

again; for Licinius has a hawk's eye, and will be sure to have his suspicions, if he see you come down with such a haggard wo-begone look as you wear just at present. You must remember you have not a long beard to cover half your face, and all your iniquities, like the venerable Xerophraustes."

So saying, he left me to my couch, indeed, but not to slumber; for busy thoughts kept me broad awake, till, after the lapse of perhaps an hour, young Sextus entered my apartment, already arrayed with more than usual elegance, to execute, however unwillingly, the message of his father. He had in his hand a small casket of open ivory-work, which he flung down on my bed, saying, "Get up, my dear Valerius, and save me at least from the pain of going alone, with these gewgaws, to this rich lady. Would to Heaven my father would marry her himself, and then I should have no objection to carry as many caskets for him as he pleases. But do you get up and assist me; and as we go along, you shall tell me what you have seen and heard in company with your jovial Prætorian."

I was soon ready, and ascended, along with my young friend, a splendid chariot, which Licinius had commanded to be ready for our conveyance. I told him shortly, as we glided through the streets, as much as I judged it expedient to be made known concerning the events of the preceding night; and, in particular, when I perceived that our charioteer was making a long circuit, in order to avoid the neighbourhood of the Amphitheatre of Vespasian, I could not help expressing to him the effect which had been produced in my mind by my casual inspection of the preparations made therein for the festival of the day.

"I am afraid," said he, after hearing my story, "that if such have been your feelings, in seeing some of the preparations alone, you will scarcely be willing to witness the exhibition itself; and yet I would fain have you to overcome your aversion, both because, whatever you may think of the propriety or impropriety of such things, it is not fitting that you should go away from Rome without once, at least, seeing with your own eyes how they

are actually conducted; and more particularly, because I much suspect Rubellia intends to be present at the festival—in which case I should be sorry to be compelled to attend upon her without you; and as to leaving her at the gate of the amphitheatre, that, you know, would be quite impossible, unless I wished openly to contradict the wishes of my father.”

I did not think it fitting to inform young Sextus of the promise under which I had already come, to be present at this great show, for purposes very different from those of paying attention to Rubellia, or shielding him from the necessity of spending a whole morning alone with her; but to set his mind at rest, I assured him he should not want any comfort my presence could afford him; although not without, at the same time, expressing my astonishment that he should consider it at all probable a lady so delicate as Rubellia would choose to sit among the spectators of an exhibition so abounding in circumstances of cruelty.

“Nay, nay,” answered he, “as for that matter, there is scarcely a lady in Rome that would be more scrupulous on that head than my gay widow; and to tell you the truth, one of the things that makes me most unwilling to go myself, is the fear that Sempronia also may be there; and, perhaps, when she sees me with Rubellia, give credence to some of the reports which have been circulated (not without my father’s assent, I think, if all were known) concerning this odious marriage, which I swear to you shall never take place, although Licinius were to drive me from his door, and adopt a stranger in room of me.”

“In good truth, Sextus,” I made answer, “if Sempronia thinks there is any thing serious between the widow and you, she must think you a pretty rascal, for the violent love you made to herself the whole of the day we were at the villa. But I am sure she will easily perceive, by your countenance, that you do not regard Rubellia, handsome as she is, with any extraordinary admiration; whereas if you were not conscious of it, I am sure she must have been so—there was never a face of more passionate love than yours, all the time you were in *her* company. And even now, the very mention of her name calls a glow into your cheeks,—

yes, and even into your eyes,—that I think would flatter Rubellia, could she excite such another, more than all the jewels of all the caskets your father will ever send to her."

"Distract me not, oh Valerius!" said the youth, interrupting me—"distract me not with speaking of that too lovely and, I fear, too scornful girl. Do you not perceive that we have at last struck into the Suburra, and are quite near to Rubellia's house?"

"Indeed and so we are," said I, looking out of the carriage. "I suspect you are quite right in thinking she means to be present at the amphitheatre, for there is a crowd, see you, of urchins assembled all about her gate, and I perceive it is a brilliant group of equipages that has attracted them. Of a surety, she proposes to go thither in all her splendour."

"Good heavens!" replied he, "I believe all the world is to be there. I don't remember ever to have passed so many gay chariots in my life; and as for the rabble, see what a stream of heads continues pouring down out of every alley along the street. My only hope is, that Rubellia may arrive too late for the best situations, and perhaps disdain to witness the spectacle from any inferior part of the amphitheatre; and yet she must have interest no doubt to have secured herself good accommodation beforehand."

He had scarcely said so when our chariot stopped, and we just descended from it in time to meet Rubellia stepping down from her portico with a gay cluster of attendants all about her. On seeing us, however, she immediately beckoned with her finger, and said, "Oh! are you come at last? Well, I must take Valerius along with myself, for I insist upon it that I shall be better able to point out to him what is worthy of his notice than any one of my company; and you, Sextus Licinius, come you also into my chariot—we will not separate you from your Orestes." She said so with an air of sprightly ease and indifference, and immediately sprung into the carriage. An elderly lady, with a broad merry face, went into it also, but there was still room for Sextus and myself; and

as for the rest of the party, they followed us in the other carriages that were waiting behind that of Rubellia.

The crowds by this time had accumulated in the street to such an extent that our horses could not advance otherwise than at a very leisurely pace; but the noise of the multitude as they rushed along, and the tumult of expectation visible on every countenance, prevented us from thinking of any thing but the approaching festival. The variety, however, and great splendour of the equipages around us, could not but attract some portion of my attention. Now it was an open chariot, it may be drawn by three or four milk-white Thessalian horses abreast, in which reclined some gorgeous female, blazing all over with jewelry, with a cluster of beautiful boys or girls around her, administering odours to her nostril; and perhaps some haughty knight or senator now and then offering the more precious refreshment of his flattery to her ear. Then, perhaps, would come rumbling along a close clumsy wagon, of the old-fashioned matronly sort, stuck quite full of the members of some substantial plebeian family—the fat, comfortable-looking citizen, and his demure spouse, sitting well back on their cushions, and having their knees loaded with a joyous and exulting progeny of little lads and lasses, whose faces would every now and then be thrust half out of the window, in spite of the frown of the father and the mother's tugging at their skirts. And then again there might be heard a cry of "Place, place," and a group of lictors would be discovered, shoving everybody aside with their rods, to clear the passage before the litter of some dignified magistrate, who, from pride or gout, preferred that species of motion to the jolting of a chariot. Such a portly person as this would soon be hurried past us, in virtue of the obsequience enforced by his attendants, but not before we had time to observe the richness of the silken cushions on which he lay extended, and the sweetness of the cloud of perfumes that was hovering about him, or yet the air of majesty with which he submitted himself to the fan of the favoured freedman, whose business it was to keep those authoritative cheeks free from the contamination of common plebeian dust and flies. Anon, a jolly band of young gallants

on horseback would come pushing rapidly along, to not a few of whom the fair Rubellia would vouchsafe her salutation as they passed. But wherever the carriage was stopped for an instant, by reason of the crowding together of all this multitude, it was wonderful to see the number of old emaciated men and withered hags that would make their way close up to the windows, and begin calling upon Rubellia, and all her attendants, to give them money to purchase a single morsel of food. The widow herself leaned back on these occasions, as if to avoid the sight of these poor creatures; but she pointed with her finger to a bag of small coin that hung in a corner of the chariot, and from it Sextus distributed abundantly to the one side and I to the other; and yet it was impossible to give to every one; insomuch that we were surrounded all the way with a mingled clamour of benedictions from those that had received, and execrations from those that had got nothing, and noisy ever-renewed solicitations from that ever-swelling army of mendicants. At last, however, we arrived in safety at the western gate of that proud amphitheatre—the same around which I had, the night before, witnessed that scene of tumultuous preparation. One of the officers in waiting there no sooner descried the equipage of Rubellia than he caused a space to be laid open for her approach, and himself advanced, with great civility, to hand her into the interior of the amphitheatre; but she whispered to Sextus and me by no means to separate from her in the crowd, although, indeed, the care we were obliged to take of the old lady that was with her might have been sufficient pledge that we could not be removed to any considerable distance.

Behold me, therefore, in the midst of the Flavian amphitheatre, and seated, under the wing of this luxurious lady, in one of the best situations which the range of benches set apart for the females and their company afforded. There was a general silence in the place at the time we entered and seated ourselves, because proclamation had just been made that the gladiators, with whose combats the exhibition of the day was appointed to commence, were about to enter upon the arena, and show themselves in order to the people. As yet, however, they

had not come forth from that place of concealment to which so many of their number were, of necessity, destined never to return; so that I had leisure to collect my thoughts, and to survey for a moment, without disturbance, the mighty and most motley multitude, piled above, below, and on every side around me, from the lordly senators, on their silken couches, along the parapet of the arena, up to the impenetrable mass of plebeian heads which skirted the horizon, above the topmost wall of the amphitheatre itself. Such was the enormous crowd of human beings, high and low, assembled therein, that when any motion went through their assembly, the noise of their rising up or sitting down could be likened to nothing, except, perhaps, the far-off sullen roaring of the illimitable sea, or the rushing of a great night-wind among the boughs of a forest. It was the first time that I had ever seen a peopled amphitheatre—nay, it was the first time that I had ever seen any very great multitude of men assembled together within any fabric of human erection; so that you cannot doubt there was, in the scene before me, enough to impress my mind with a very serious feeling of astonishment—not to say of veneration. Not less than eighty thousand human beings (for such they told me was the stupendous capacity of the building), were here met together. Such a multitude can nowhere be regarded, without inspiring a certain indefinite, indefinable sense of majesty; least of all, when congregated within the wide sweep of such a glorious edifice as this, and surrounded on all sides with every circumstance of ornament and splendour, befitting an everlasting monument of Roman victories, the munificence of Roman princes, and the imperial luxury of universal Rome. Judge, then, with what eyes of wonder all this was surveyed by me, who had but of yesterday, as it were, emerged from the solitary stillness of a British valley—who had been accustomed all my life to consider as among the most impressive of human spectacles, the casual passage of a few scores of legionaries, through some dark alley of a wood or awe-struck village of barbarians.

Trajan himself was already present, but in nowise, except from the canopy over his ivory chair, to be dis-

tinguished from the other consul that sat over-against him ; tall, nevertheless, and of a surety very majestic in his demeanour ; grave, sedate, and benign in countenance, even according to the likeness which you have seen upon his medals and statues. He was arrayed in a plain gown, and appeared to converse quite familiarly, and without the least affectation of condescension, with such patricians as had their places near him ; among whom Sextus and Rubellia pointed out many remarkable personages to my notice : as, for example, Adrian, who afterward became emperor ; Pliny the orator, a man of very courtly presence, and lively, agreeable aspect ; and, above all, the historian Tacitus, the worthy son-in-law of our Agricola, in whose pale countenance I thought I could easily recognise the depth, but sought in vain to discover any traces of the sternness, of his genius. Of all the then proud names that were whispered into my ear, could I recollect or repeat them now, how few would awaken any interest in your minds ! Those, indeed, which I have mentioned have an interest that will never die. Would that the greatest and the best of them all were to be remembered only for deeds of greatness and goodness !

The proclamation being repeated a second time, a door on the right-hand of the arena was laid open, and a single trumpet sounded, as it seemed to me mournfully, while the gladiators marched in with slow steps, each man naked, except being girt with a cloth about his loins—bearing on his left arm a small buckler, and having a short straight sword suspended by a cord around his neck. They marched, as I have said, slowly and steadily ; so that the whole assembly had full leisure to contemplate the forms of the men ; while those who were, or who imagined themselves to be, skilled in the business of the arena, were fixing in their own minds on such as they thought most likely to be victorious, and laying wagers concerning their chances of success, with as much unconcern as if they had been contemplating so many irrational animals, or rather indeed, I should say, so many senseless pieces of ingenious mechanism. The wide diversity of complexion and feature exhibited among these devoted athletes afforded at once a majestic idea of the

extent of the Roman empire, and a terrible one of the purposes to which that wide sway had too often been made subservient. The beautiful Greek, with a countenance of noble serenity, and limbs after which the sculptors of his country might have modelled their godlike symbols of graceful power, walked side by side with the yellow-bearded savage, whose gigantic muscles had been nerved in the freezing waves of the Elbe or the Danube, or whose thick strong hair was congealed and shagged on his brow with the breath of Scythian or Scandinavian winters. Many fierce Moors and Arabs and curled Ethiopians were there, with the beams of the southern sun burnt in every various shade of swarthinness upon their skins. Nor did our own remote island want her representatives in the deadly procession; for I saw among the armed multitude—and that not altogether without some feelings of more peculiar interest—two or three gaunt barbarians, whose breasts and shoulders bore uncouth marks of blue and purple, so vivid in the tints that I thought many months could not have elapsed since they must have been wandering in wild freedom along the native ridges of some Silurian or Caledonian forest. As they moved around the arena, some of these men were saluted by the whole multitude with noisy acclamations, in token, I supposed, of the approbation wherewith the feats of some former festival had deserved to be remembered. On the appearance of others, groans and hisses were heard from some parts of the amphitheatre, mixed with contending cheers and huzzas from others of the spectators. But by far the greater part were suffered to pass on in silence; this being in all likelihood the first (alas! who could tell whether it might not also be the last) day of their sharing in that fearful exhibition!

Their masters paired them shortly, and in succession they began to make proof of their fatal skill. At first, Scythian was matched against Scythian—Greek against Greek—Ethiopian against Ethiopian—Spaniard against Spaniard; and I saw the sand died beneath their feet with blood streaming from the wounds of kindred hands. But these combats, although abundantly bloody and terrible, were regarded only as preludes to the serious busi-

ness of the day, which consisted of duels between Europeans on the one side and Africans on the other ; wherein it was the wellnigh intransgressible law of the amphitheatre, that at least one out of every pair of combatants should die on the arena before the eyes of the multitude. Instead of shrinking from the more desperate brutalities of these latter conflicts, the almost certainty of their fatal termination seemed only to make the assembly gaze on them with a more intense curiosity, and a more inhuman measure of delight. Methinks I feel as if it were but of yesterday, when, sickened with the protracted terrors of a conflict that seemed as if it were never to have an end, although both the combatants were already covered all over with hideous gashes, I at last bowed down my head, and clasped my hands upon my eyes, to save them from the torture of gazing thereon further : and I had scarcely done so, when Rubellia laid her hand upon my elbow, whispering, "Look, look, now look," in a voice of low steady impatience. I did look, but not to the arena : no, it was upon the beautiful features of that woman's face that I looked ; and truly it seemed to me as if they presented a spectacle almost as fearful as that from which I had just averted mine eyes. I saw those rich lips parted asunder, and those dark eyes extended in their sockets, and those smooth cheeks suffused with a steadfast blush, and that lovely bosom swelled and glowing ; and I hated Rubellia as I gazed, for I knew not before how utterly beauty can be brutalized by the throbbings of a cruel heart. But I looked round to escape from the sight of her ; and then the hundreds of females that I saw with their eyes fixed, with equal earnestness, on the same spot of horrors, taught me, even at the moment, to think with more charity of that pitiless gaze of one.

At that instant all were silent, in the contemplation of the breathless strife ; insomuch that a groan, the first that had escaped from either of the combatants, although low and reluctant, and half-suppressed, sounded quite distinctly amid the deep hush of the assembly, and being constrained thereby to turn mine eyes once more downward, I beheld that, at length, one of the two had received the sword of his adversary quite through his body,

and had sunk before him upon the sand. A beautiful young man was he that had received this harm, with fair hair, clustered in glossy ringlets upon his neck and brows; but the sickness of his wound was already visible on his drooping eyelids, and his lips were pale, as if the blood had rushed from them to the untimely outlet. Nevertheless, the Moorish gladiator who had fought with him had drawn forth again his weapon, and stood there awaiting in silence the decision of the multitude, whether at once to slay the defenceless youth, or to assist in removing him from the arena, if perchance the blood might be stopped from flowing, and some hope of recovery even yet extended to him. Hereupon there arose, on the instant, a loud voice of contention; and it seemed to me as if the wounded man regarded the multitude with a proud and withal contemptuous glance, being aware, without question, that he had executed all things so as to deserve their compassion, but aware, moreover, that even had that been freely vouchsafed to him, it was too late for any hope of safety. But the cruelty of their faces, it may be, and the loudness of their cries, were a sorrow to him, and filled his dying breast with loathing. Whether or not the haughtiness of his countenance had been observed by them with displeasure, I cannot say; but so it was, that those who had cried out to give him a chance of recovery were speedily silent, and the emperor, looking round, and seeing all the thumbs turned downward (for that is, you know, the signal of death), was constrained to give the sign, and forthwith the young man, receiving again without a struggle the sword of the Moor into his gashed bosom, breathed forth his life, and lay stretched out in his blood upon the place of guilt. With that a joyous clamour was uplifted by many of those that looked upon it, and the victorious Moor, being crowned with an ivy garland, was carried in procession around the arena by certain young men, who leaped down for that purpose from the midst of the assembly. In the mean time, those that had the care of such things dragged away, with a filthy hook, the corpse of him that had been slain; and then raking up the sand over the blood that had fallen from him, prepared the place, with indifferent countenances,

for some other cruel tragedy of the same kind, while all around me the spectators were seen rising from their places and saluting each other ; and there was a buzz of talking as universal as the silence had been during the combat ; some speaking of it, and paying and receiving money lost and won upon its issue ; some already laughing merrily, and discoursing concerning other matters, even as if nothing uncommon had been witnessed ; while others again appeared to be entirely occupied with the martial music which ever struck up majestically at such pauses in the course of the cruel exhibition ; some beating time upon the benches before them, others lightly joining their voices in unison with the proud notes of the trumpets and clarions. But as for Rubellia, she talked gayly with Sextus, inviting him to ridicule me along with her, for the strangeness of behaviour I had displayed.

The sun by this had already mounted high in the heavens, and the glare became so intolerable that men could no longer fight on equal terms ; which being perceived, the emperor gave command to look after the wild beasts, and in the mean time (for I heard his voice distinctly) to hold Thraso the Christian in readiness, and give warning to the Flamens that they should have their altar set forth.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER saying so, the emperor, attended by those immediately about his person, withdrew by his private method of access ; but Rubellia told me he had only gone to the Palatine by the subterraneous path, for the purpose of taking some refreshment, and that there was no doubt he would return in time to witness the remaining parts of the spectacle. This example, however, was followed in some sort by a great part of the spectators, for some departed altogether from the walls of the amphitheatre, while many more were seen moving from place

to place, crossing from one vomitory to another, and paying their respects to different parties of friends, who had occupied places at a distance from them during the combats of the gladiators. In the mean time, certain servants of Trajan's household were observed giving directions in the arena to a great number of persons, who afterward began to distribute baskets of dried fish, bread, and other eatables among such as chose to accept of them; while viands of a more costly description were introduced among the wealthy by slaves and freedmen of their own. Neither were the bearers of water-jars idle, nor such as make a trade of selling fruit and wine upon the Roman streets; least of all, those whose traffic is in snow, for the purpose of cooling liquor; of whom, I believe, hundreds were scrambling in all quarters over the benches, and whistling shrilly as they moved, which is their method of signifying the presence of that in which they deal.

Now the Lady Rubellia was not one of those who would ever leave her friends destitute of the means of refreshment on such an occasion; as this; and accordingly, two or three of her household were soon with us, bearing jars of sweetmeats in their hands, also divers baskets of fruit, and flasks of wine, with all the other appurtenances of a luxurious collation. We had scarcely begun to taste of these things, when our attention was attracted by some one leaping with great activity from one row of benches to another, behind us; and looking round, I discovered, with ease, the rosy countenance of Sabinus, whose anxiety to join us was, as I immediately suspected, the cause of all this violent exertion. An ordinary person would have sought some circuitous method of approach, rather than attempt the sheer descent from one of the stone parapets which rose immediately in our rear; but the brawny limbs of the centurion shrunk not from that adventurous leap; and, in a word, I soon found him seated beside us, and bowing and smiling to Rubellia with all his usual mixture of boldness and suavity. He delayed not long from participation in the delicacies that stood before us; but, on the contrary, forthwith lifted up a goblet full of Falernian, and having set it to his lips, drank down with-

out stopping, till he could see the very foundation of its interior gold. His fingers also soon became acquainted with the receptacles of fruit and confectionary ; and from the zealous attention he paid to their contents, I was half inclined to have some little suspicion that he might perhaps have remained in his original situation, had he not chanced to observe the slaves of Rubellia as they came up the vomitory with their comely-looking napkin-covered baskets upon their heads. As it was, his arrival was highly acceptable to all of us, except perhaps to Rubellia herself, who, I thought, looked as if she were not over-much pleased with the interruption his mirthful talk occasioned to the conversation on which she had been endeavouring to fix the attention of Licinius.

For that, however, another interruption, no less effectual, had been already prepared in another part of the assembly, from which the sage Xerophrastes had for some time, I doubt not, been casting eyes not less longing than those of the Prætorian, on the banquet wherein we were sharing. There was such a crowd, however, immediately below us, that I know not whether the philosopher would ever have been able to make his way to the coveted region where we sat, had it not been that we heard his voice in disputation, and entreated those that opposed his passage, if possible, to make room for him. The first glimpse we had of his countenance showed us that the squeezing of those about him had been giving him serious inconvenience ; for his countenance was wonderfully purple, and the drops of perspiration stood visible on his bald front ; insomuch that although we could not help smiling at his ruefulness of visage, it would have been excessively cruel to neglect giving our assistance to extricate him from a plight apparently so agonizing.

The persons to whom he was immediately addressing himself, moreover, seemed to be listening to him with such utter unconcern that it was impossible not to feel somewhat displeased with them, for treating so disrespectfully one whom his gray hairs alone might have entitled to at least some decent portion of courtesy. In vain did he represent to them (for we heard his strong voice distinctly every now and then, in spite of the tumult that

surrounded him), that it was not for the sake of any personal ease or convenience he was desirous of penetrating into an upper part of the amphitheatre. In vain did he seek to explain to them that it was the call of duty, and the sense of moral obligation, which instigated him to that difficult and perilous ascent. In vain did he reiterate "My pupil"—"my disciple"—"my young disciple"—"my scholar Sextus Licinius"—"the son of Caius Licinius"—"the son of the great orator Caius Licinius is there,—and how can I permit myself to remain absent from him!" In vain did he enlarge upon the constancy of attention which philosophers owe to those who are placed by the hands of parents under their superintendence. In vain did he address himself to the pity of the young; not less vainly did he appeal to the reason of the old, obtesting half the deities of Olympus to the purity of his motives, and the truth of his statements,—all were alike careless of him, his motives, his statements, his duties, his sufferings, and his desires. No sooner, however, did Sextus and I begin to show the interest we took in his situation, than Sabinus raised himself up on the bench, and called aloud on those that surrounded the old man, with a voice of much sternness and authority, to let him pass immediately at their peril.

Many eyes were forthwith turned towards us; and whether it were the dignity and haughtiness of the centurion's own voice and attitude, or that his Prætorian garb alone gave him much weight in the assembly, the resistance whereby the stoic had been so long and so grievously obstructed was very soon relaxed, and Xerophrates enjoyed an opportunity of almost entirely recovering his usual serenity of aspect before he reached us. The first thing he did was to accept of a goblet which I held out to him, and to drain it in a manner that would have done no discredit to the centurion himself; then he swallowed two or three great handfuls of grapes; and then at length turning round, with much courtesy did he thank us all, but most of all the centurion, for the part he had taken in working out his deliverance from the hands, as he expressed it, of those inhuman and illiterate persons, enemies alike to science and to virtue; "while

you," he continued, "oh most brave and gallant warrior, have shown that in your breast, as in that of Epaminondas of old—of Alexander himself indeed—and of your own illustrious Julius—the reverence of the Muses and of divine philosophy does not disdain to inhabit along with the ardour of active patriotism, and the spirit-stirring delights of Mars."

"Oh ! as for that," interrupted Rubellia, with a smile, "all the world knows that Sabinus is quite a philosopher—he was just beginning a very learned harangue when we were attracted by your voice in the crowd ; and you have the more reason to thank him, because he was cut very unseasonably short, in consequence of the distress in which we perceived you."

"Most noble lady !" replied the stoic, "you know not how much you have delighted me ; from the first moment, indeed, that my eyes rested upon the countenance of your heroic friend, I suspected that he had subjected himself to some other discipline besides that of camps. I saw the traces of thought, lady—and serious contemplation. The mind can never exercise its faculties without conveying some symptoms of those internal operations to the external surface of the visage. The soul can never energize habitually without betraying its activity in the delicacy and acumen which the more elegant and susceptible parts of the corporeal frame acquire during those elaborate and mysterious processes of thought. I saw, therefore, and suspected. But what thanks are not due to you, for having so agreeably confirmed me in this happy suspicion ! Of a surety, the noise and tumult of the camp are not so well adapted for the theoretic or contemplative life, as perfect leisure and retirement ; yet, who shall doubt that the soul of great energy can overcome all such disadvantages ? Who shall think that the spirit of Socrates did not eagerly philosophize during the campaign he served ? Who shall say that the Stagyrte must have suspended his acute although imperfect investigations, even although he had accompanied his royal pupil across the Hellespont, and attended all the motions of his victorious army, instead of staying at home to teach the youth of Greece ? Who, finally," said he, casting his courteous eyes full on the

Prætorian, "shall suspect but that this generous warrior has been effectually advancing the growth of philosophic science within his own mind at least,—if not composing works in his intervals of leisure, destined hereafter to benefit and instruct the world, even although he may have been attending the flight of the Roman eagles from utmost Britain to the desert frontiers of the Parthian?"

"Nobody, indeed," replied the sportive lady, "nobody, indeed, who has enjoyed any opportunity of being acquainted with the centurion, can have any doubt on that head. Sabinus," she continued, turning towards him, "what philosophic treatise are you at present engaged with? Come, now, speak out, and truly; are you still busy with your *περί της φύσεως τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ βακχικοῦ*,* that you were quoting from the other night?—or are you deep in '*the delight of contemplation*'?—or—"

"Not at all," quoth the centurion, interrupting her; "I am only deep in *love*—"

Saying so, he laid his hand in a very tender fashion upon his breast, and even, as I thought, began to throw a little sentiment into his eyes; but he had no opportunity of going on with his speech, for Xerophastes had no sooner heard him utter the word *love*, than he immediately began to pour out a new rhapsody.

"Love!" quoth he, "ha! love: in good sooth, a noble subject, and one concerning which not a few laudable treatises have been composed by the philosophers. Yet, without question, much remains to be done in this matter; and I should be most proud if the illustrious Sabinus would vouchsafe to me a perusal of his invaluable speculations. Without question," he continued, "you have commenced with a proper definition and division of the subject. You have distinguished between what is properly called *love*, and the other more or less kindred affections with which hallucinating writers have too often committed the error of confounding it. You have described, in the first place, the difference between it and the *storgé*, or natural affection which parents have for their offspring—an affection in which not a few of the

* "Concerning the nature of the Bacchic stimulus."

irrational tribes appear (if physiology may be trusted) to us even superior to the human race."

"Hens, for example," quoth the centurion, with a face of infinite gravity.

"Even so—*hens*," continued the sage; "an apt illustration and an acute. I perceive, indeed, lady," whispered he to Rubellia, "that you have not deceived me concerning the attainments of this your noble friend—*hens*—a most acute illustration!—See you now, O Sextus!" he went on, "it is not the characteristic of true philosophy to despise those illustrations which are drawn from the affairs of ordinary life, and the common surfaces of things. No: it is rather her part to show forth her own intrinsic excellence and splendour, by raising that which is in itself low and customary, to unknown and unexpected dignity, by her methods of felicitous and beautifying application. See you, now, with what unexampled skill this hero—this philosopher, I should rather say—may I presume to add, this brother-philosopher?—has illustrated the nature of *love* in this treatise of his, by introducing the domestic habits of your common household fowl? Such things should not pass unheeded by the young aspirants to learning, because these, more than any other circumstances, may furnish them with encouragement to proceed in their course, by showing how many of the materials of philosophy lie everywhere under the eyes of the most common traveler of the path of life; and how assuredly it is the fault of the individual himself, if he neglect the means of spiritual advancement which are sure to be afforded in whatever situation may chance to have been assigned to him."

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you," said Rubellia; "but Sabinus has almost finished the grapes while you have been speaking; and I would only just beg to suggest, that it is the fault of the individual Xerophrastes, if he neglects the means of corporal refreshment, which may yet be afforded him by what remains in the basket."

"Most kind lady," resumed he, "your benevolence is worthy of your nobility. But you know not how much the philosophy I have embraced tends to lessen the natural desires of man for such things as you allude to—nevertheless," he continued, "I will not refuse to partake yet

further of your bounty ; for, of a surety, I have been sorely dealt with in the multitude, as yourselves witnessed."

So saying, he took hold of the basket, and began to feel in the bottom of it, but found very little to his purpose ; for, to say the truth, the rest of the party had been almost as eager in their attentions to it as the jolly centurion himself. A few slender bunches, notwithstanding, were still there, one of which the philosopher thrust into his mouth, and the rest he concealed beneath one of the folds of his huge mantle, until he should have made an end of his criticism on the imaginary treatise of the newly dubbed sage Sabinus. While he was busied in hemming and coughing, and other obvious and not to be mistaken preparations for a renewal of his harangue, I could with difficulty keep myself from laughing outright, so egregiously was the natural language of the broad, jovial, and unreflective countenance of our worthy centurion at variance from the notion of his attainments and pursuits, which this merry lady had been amusing herself with instilling into the mind of the pedagogue. Rubellia herself, however, appeared to enjoy the thing far more keenly than either Sextus or I ; insomuch that I was afraid Xerophrastes would penetrate through the joke she was playing off upon him, before he had given himself his full swing in regard to the commendation of the Prætorian. But Sabinus on his side was, as it seemed, of opinion that he had already heard enough of such disquisitions ; for he had scarcely seen out the last cup of Rubellia's Falerian, ere he began to give hints that he wished very much to descend into the arena, for the purpose of observing the animals about to be exhibited, while they were yet in their cages. Xerophrastes, however, even when he had heard him signify this desire, appeared still to be resolved on considering him as one of the philosophic order of mankind ; for he at once offered to accompany him, saying that the visit was of course intended for the gratification of some scientific curiosity, and that therefore he should think himself extremely culpable did he neglect the opportunity of going along with him.

"Come, come, then," quoth the good-natured Sabinus,

"since you will have it so, by all means prepare yourself for the descent: but at least allow me to precede you, that there may be no risk of any more untimely obstructions, such as you have already this day experienced."

"Most assuredly, noble centurion," replied Xerophrates "in this, as in all things, I shall be proud to be enumerated among your followers. Sextus, my pupil, also," he added, "and his friend, will of a certainty accompany us, that they may benefit by our discourse, as well as by seeing whatever may be subjected to our observation."

"Nay, my friend," said Rubellia, "that were not quite fair, neither; would you leave the ladies entirely by themselves in the midst of the amphitheatre? I hope Sextus Licinius, at least, will have the courtesy to remain with us for our protection."

So saying, she laid her hand on my companion's arm, with a look which satisfied me she was quite resolved not to part with him. The old lady who was with her then said something about the impropriety of leaving only one of the party to attend upon two females; but I took advantage of her low tone to pretend ignorance of that which she had uttered, and immediately rose to accompany the centurion and Xerophrates.

"You had better go quickly," said Sextus, as we departed; "for surely the interval of the spectacles must, by this time, be wellnigh at an end; and if those that have gone out once begin to rush in again, you may perhaps have some difficulty in regaining your places."

"Give fear to the winds," quoth Sabinus; "am not I with them, that know every lion-feeder in Rome by the head-mark? and how do you suppose that there is any chance of the exhibition recommencing without my having sufficient warning? It is not for nothing that I have lost and won so many thousand sesterces in the amphitheatre. No, no—I wish only as much respect were paid to experience everywhere else as it is in the arena to your true old bettor. Already," he added, "I perceive that half a dozen of those knowing characters down below, about the entrances to the dens, have detected me, even at this distance, and I know they are wondering very much among themselves that I have not yet descended

among them. They must fancy my purse is in a very poor state indeed, when I don't seem to think it worth while to take even a single peep at the beasts ere they are brought out of their cages. Come, Xerophrastes, my most worthy brother in philosophy, and you, my jolly fellow-voyager, Valerius, let us be alert, and move downward, else we may chance, when all is done, to arrive the day after Platæa."

With that we began to descend with much alacrity, and, leaving the reluctant Sextus to his fate, were soon near to the margin of the arena. We had no sooner arrived there than an old skin-dried limping Numidian, with a bit of lion's hide fastened round his loins—one who, from his leanness and blackness, had very much the appearance of having been baked to a cinder,—observed the centurion, and drew near to him with many nod and significant grins of recognition. Sabinus, on his part, seemed noways backward to acknowledge this old acquaintance; but, on the contrary, began to talk with him in a strange sort of broken dialect, which, as I afterward learned, was chiefly composed of Punic vocables,—and all, I doubt not, concerning the business of the day. After this had lasted some minutes, he took Xerophrastes and me by the hand, and seemed to introduce us to the Numidian, who then desired us all to come down, and he would conduct us to a place where we should see something not unworthy of being seen. I was just about to follow these directions when I felt my gown seized from behind, and looking round, observed that it was my faithful man Boto, who, from the heat and confusion of his aspect, appeared not to have come thither without a considerable struggle. Sabinus, seeing him, said, "Ah! my old friend Boto, how have you come to this part of the amphitheatre? We must not leave you behind us, however; of a surety, you have never seen a lion—you shall descend along with your master; and who knows but we may persuade Xerophrastes that you also are a brother philosopher?"

"Most noble master," replied the grateful slave, "I saw you and Valerius from the very topmost bench of the place, where I have been sitting for these three hours with Dromo, and I no sooner saw you than I was determined

to draw near to you, if it were possible. To go from this place up to yonder quarter would perhaps be impossible ; but it is never a very difficult matter to go down in this world ; so, saving your presence, masters all, I trundled myself over the benches, and when heads were in my way, I e'en trundled myself over them too."

"It is well, good Briton," quoth the centurion—by this time we had crossed the arena,—“and now prepare to exercise your eyes as well as you already have exercised your limbs ; for know, that very near to you is the abode of nobler animals than even your lord hath ever observed."

With this the old Numidian opened one of the iron doors looking in upon the arena, and having received some money from us, admitted us to the sight of a long flight of marble steps, which appeared to descend into the bowels of the earth, far below the foundation of the amphitheatre.

"Come along, masters," quoth he ; “we had better go down this way, for we shall have a better view of the animals so than on the other side. My master, Sabinus, will tell you all, that old Aspar knows as much about these things as any Numidian in the place."

"Indeed, since my old friend Bisbal is gone," quoth the centurion, “there is not another of the whole set that is to be compared to you."

"Ah !" replied Aspar, “Bisbal was a great man ; there is not a feeder in Rome that is worthy to tie the latchet of his sandals, if he were alive."

"Why, as to that," said the other, “old Bisbal was very seldom worth a pair of sandals worth the tying, when he was alive ; but, come on, we have no great leisure for talking now, and Aspar can, of a surety, show a lion with any Bisbal that ever wielded a whip. Come on."

We soon reached a large vaulted place, apparently below the amphitheatre, the sides of which were almost entirely covered with iron gratings,—while up and down the open space were strolling many strange groups of men, connected in different capacities with the bloody spectacles of the arena. On one hand, we saw some of the gladiators, who had already been combating, walking

to and fro with restless and agitated steps, as if they had not yet been able to recover themselves from the violent state of excitement into which their combats had thrown them. Even of such as had been victorious, I observed that not a few partook in all these symptoms of uneasiness; and the contrast thus exhibited to the proud and haughty mien of calmness they had so lately been displaying affected me with a strange sense of the irrational and inhuman life these unhappy persons were condemned by folly or necessity to lead. The blood had forsaken the lips and cheeks of others, and from the fixed stare of their eyes, it appeared that their minds were entirely withdrawn from every thing passing around them. Their limbs, so recently nerved to the utmost show of vigour, were now relaxed and unstrung, and they trod the marble-floor with heavy and straggling feet. But they that appeared to me to be in the most wretched state were such as, they told us, expected to be led forth shortly to contend with the wild beasts, in whose immediate vicinity they were now walking. The prospect of combating with a human opponent calls into action the fierceness and the pride of man; but he that has to fight with a beast, how should he not be weighed down with the sense of mortal degradation; and how should the reason that is in him not fill him, in such a prospect, with dispiriting and humbling, rather than with strengthening and stimulating, thoughts? Howbeit, the centurion, although the most good-natured of mankind, being rendered from custom quite callous to these things, immediately entered into conversation with some of those unfortunates, in a tone of coolness and unconcern that shocked me the more because it did not seem in the smallest degree to shock those to whom his words were addressed. Among other topics, he enlarged at much length to one of them upon the best method of evading the attack of a tiger.

"Look ye now," said he, "there are some that are always for taking things, as they call it, in good time,—these will be pointing their swords before the creature makes his spring; but I have seen what comes of that, and so has old Aspar here, if he would be honest enough to confess it. The true way is, to watch his eye when he is sitting; let him fairly fix upon his mark, and spring; but

at the moment when he is taking his leap, then is the time for the gladiator to start aside, and have at him with a side-thrust. Your side-thrust is the only one I would lay an *as* upon."

"It was always on the side-thrust," quoth the grinning Aspar,—“it was always on your cool steady side-thrust, the moment he had sprung, that the great Bisbal used to stake himself. Ha! ha! I was fond of the side-thrust in my day myself; but I got a scratch once; witness my poor leg, masters,—and since then I am a poor feeder.”

“I was always clear for the side-thrust,” quoth Sabinius. “I never saw it fail but twice, and then, to be sure, the men died; but they could have had no chance at all with the front-guard; and it is always something,” continued he, clapping one of the poor expecting gladiators on the back,—“it is always something to have a chance. Be sure you try him with the side-thrust, if it come to your turn to-day.”

The poor creature—he also was an African—lifted up his head on being so addressed, and showed all his white teeth in a melancholy attempt at a smile; but said not a word in reply, and forthwith became as downcast as ever again. But the centurion took little or no heed of the manner in which his advice had been received. He contemplated the man's figure for a moment, as if to form some judgment concerning the measure of his strength; and after doing the like in regard to some of his companions, commanded Aspar to show us where the prime lions of the day were reposing.

The Numidian no sooner heard him say so, than he seized in his hand a long pole that was leaning against one of the pillars of the vault, and led us to a certain part of the grated wall, behind which was the den, wherein six monstrous Atlantic lions were kept. I looked in upon them with wonder, and not without dread, through the iron net-work of the doors. An imperfect gleam of light descended from above upon their tawny hides and glaring eyes. They, like the gladiators, seemed also to be preparing for the combat; but not, like them, in fear, nor in cold dewy tremours; for the deprivation of food, which they had been made to suffer in prospect of the exhibition,

had roused all the energies of their savage natures ; inso-much that a sulky and yearning rage seemed to spread through every nerve and sinew of their gigantic frames, and to make them paw their quadrangular prison with long and pliant strides. They moved, however, as yet, in total silence ; so that Boto, having fixed his eyes upon them, took courage to approach the grate,—slowly, nevertheless, and with a face that appeared to lengthen an inch for every inch he advanced. But when he had almost touched the bars, one of the huge lions came forward towards him, with something between a growl and a sigh, which made Boto spring backward with great and surprising agility, and with such force, that both he and Xerophrastes, who happened unfortunately to be standing a little way behind him, were overthrown at all their length upon the floor.

Hereupon the centurion and the limping old keeper immediately burst out into loud laughter ; but Xerophrastes, rising and shaking his garment, said with some warmth, “ Think not, oh Sabinus, that any sudden start of fear has thus ridiculously stretched me upon the floor ; but attribute the mischance only to this rude offspring of British earth, whose unreclaimed natural feelings are still shamefully affected by natural causes.”

“ Castor and Pollux,” quoth the centurion,—“ you take every thing too seriously, my friend.”

“ I take it not seriously,” replied he, with admirable gravity. “ My philosophy forbids me to do so ; it has steeled me against externals.”

“ Has it so, in faith ?” rejoined the centurion. “ I think something of your equanimity is, in fact, owing to the trifling circumstance, that you have in reality received no injury whatever from your tumble. And as to steeling, let me tell you, I think the iron in the grated door there is much better placed than in the bosom of a philosopher : for, in the door, it serves the purpose of preventing all harm ; but if these animals were once out, all the mental steel of which you boast, would not save every bone in your body from being cracked in the twanging of a bow-string.”

“ You speak,” replied Xerophrastes, “ as if you had em-

braced the tenets of a sect not worthy of the lovers of wisdom—you speak as if the artificial contrivances of human workmen were all in all. An iron cage may confine wild beasts ; but can cages be made for all those misfortunes to which mankind are liable, and against which the force of the mind is their only means of defence ? Can you cage the Eumenides, when they come to avenge a life spent in ignoble indolence and degrading luxury ?”

“ In truth,” replied the centurion, with a smile, “ I have never seen the Eumenides except once, and that was in the theatre of Athens. But Boto perhaps has been more fortunate. Did you ever see the Eumenides, good Boto ?”

“ No, master,” replied stupidly the perplexed Boto, “ I never was at the theatre.”

“ Ye gods !” exclaimed the stoic, his lips smiling with lofty scorn—“ Ye gods ! of a surety this Britain must have been the last spot rescued from the dominion of Chaos !”

CHAPTER XIII.

BUT while we were yet contemplating those enormous animals, and amused with the perplexity of Boto, the trumpets were blown in the amphitheatre, and no sooner did the sound of them penetrate into the vaults, than it was evident, from the bustle which ensued, that the emperor had returned to his place, and that the spectacle was about to recommence. With all speed, therefore, did we reascend to the upper air, leaving the gladiators in the act of mustering in their respective quarters of the gloomy vault ; and the feeders not less busied in preparing their beasts for the expected combat. Had we not been under the protection of Sabinus, we should have attempted in vain to regain our places ; but he being an acknowledged and current authority, known in every department of the amphitheatre, the door-keepers, and other functionaries, durst refuse him nothing ; insomuch

that room was made for us where no room appeared ; and, in a word, we shortly found ourselves once more seated by the side of Rubellia and Sextus.

The day was by this time considerably advanced ; and, in spite of the awnings spread all overhead, the rays of the sun were so powerful that the marble benches felt hot to the touch, wherever they were exposed to them ; and altogether there was such a glare and fervour throughout the place, that my eyes began to be weary of gazing ; and very gladly would I have retired, rather than remain to see out the rest of the exhibition. Nevertheless, there was no appearance of any one having gone away in weariness ; but, on the contrary, the seats, and even the passages, seemed to be more crowded than they had been in the anterior part of the morning.

The arena was perfectly vacant when I looked down upon it ; but in a short time a single old man, who, as Rubellia told me, had, without doubt, been found guilty of some atrocious wickedness, was led forth from a small wicket on the one side, and presently, his fetters being struck off, those that conducted him retired, leaving him alone upon the sand. The eyes of this malefactor refused at first to look steadfastly on the objects around him, and it seemed to me that he had probably been long confined in some dark place, so grievously did the dazzling splendour reflected from the floor and walls appear to bewilder and confound him. Nevertheless, after a brief space, he seemed, in some measure, to recover himself, and assumed a posture of calm resignation, leaning with one hand against the parapet, as if he needed support to uphold himself. Pallid and extenuated were the outlines of the old man's visage, and his hair and beard exhibited not a little of the squalidness attendant on long and hopeless confinement ; yet there was something in the attitude, and even in the countenance, of the man, which made me harbour the suspicion that he had not, at some former period, been altogether unacquainted with the luxuries and refinements of social life. The beauty, indeed, of the mould in which his form had originally been cast, might, perhaps, have been the sole cause of these casual demonstrations of elegance ; yet it was impossible not to regard

the man with greater interest, by reason of the contrast which imagination could suggest between what he once might have been, perhaps had been, and what he now was.

A feeling of somewhat the same sort seemed, of a truth, to pervade many more in the assembly besides myself; and I heard a continual whispering among those around me, as if there was a general anxiety to learn something concerning the history of the man. No one, however, appearing to be able to say any thing concerning him, I kept my eyes fixed upon himself, awaiting the issue in silence. Judge, then, what was my surprise when one of the heralds of Trajan, having commanded that there should be silence in the amphitheatre, said, "Let Thraso of Antioch come forth and answer to the things that shall be alleged against him." To which the old man, who was alone in the arena, immediately made reply, "Here am I—my name is Thraso of Antioch." In vain, however, even after hearing the well-remembered voice, did I attempt to persuade myself that the face was such as I had pictured within myself; for, as to seeing it, I have already told you that utter darkness prevailed in the dungeon all the time I was there with him.

Then arose the prefect of the city, who had his place immediately under the chair of the prince, and said in a voice which, although not loud, was heard distinctly all through the amphitheatre, "Thraso of Antioch, being accused of blasphemy and contempt for the gods, has been brought hither, either to refute this charge, by doing homage at the altar of Jupiter Best and Greatest; or, persisting in his rebellion against Rome, and the prince, and the religion of the state, to suffer openly the punishment which the laws of the state have affixed to such perversity. Let him remain where he is until the Flamens invite us all to join in the sacrifice."

Then Thraso, hearing these words, stepped forth into the middle of the arena, and folding his arms upon his breast, stood there composedly, without once lifting up his eyes, either to the place from which the prefect had spoken to him, or to any other region of the amphitheatre. The situation in which he stood was such, that I com-

manded, where I sat, a full and distinct view of every movement of the old man's countenance, and assuredly my eyes were in no danger of being directed away from him. For a few moments there was perfect silence throughout the assembly, until at length the same herald, who had previously spoken made proclamation for the doors to be thrown open, that the priests of Jupiter might have access to the arena. Whereupon there was heard forthwith a noise, as of the turning of some heavy machinery, and a part of the ground-work of the arena itself appeared to be giving way, right over-against that quarter in which Thraso had his station. But of this the purpose was soon manifested, when there arose from underneath into the space thus vacated, a certain wooden stage, or platform, covered all over with rich carpetings, whereof the centre was occupied by a marble altar, set forth already with all the usual appurtenances of sacrifice, and surmounted on one side by a gigantic statue of bronze, in which it was easy to recognise all the features of the great Phidian Jupiter. Neither had the altar any sooner made its appearance there, and the sound of the machinery, by which its great weight had been lifted, ceased to be heard, than, even as the herald had given command, the main gates of the amphitheatre were expanded, and thereby a free passage prepared for the procession of the Flamens. With that, all those that were present in the amphitheatre, arose from their seats and stood up, and a sweet symphony of lutes and clarions ushered in the sacred band to the place appointed for them. And first of all, there marched a train of fifty beautiful boys, and then an equal number of very young maidens, all, both boys and maidens, arrayed in white tunics, and having their heads crowned with oaken garlands, and bearing in their hands fresh branches of the oak-tree, which, above all the other trees of the forest, is, as you have heard and well know, held dear and sacred to Jupiter. Then these youthful bands were separated, and they arranged themselves, the boys on the right and the girls on the left-hand of the altar, some of them standing on the arena itself, and others on either side, upon the steps of the platform whereon the altar was fixed; and beautiful indeed was their array, and comely

and guiltless were their looks ; and much modesty was apparent, both in the downcast eyes and closed lips with which some of them stood there to await the issue of their coming, and in the juvenile admiration wherewith others of them were regarding the wide and splendid assemblage around them ; insomuch that I could not but feel within myself a certain dread and fearfulness, when I saw the feet of so many tender and innocent ones placed there upon the same hot and guilty sand which had so often drunk the blood of fierce beasts and cruel malefactors—alas ! which had drunk the blood of the innocent also—and which was yet to drink thereof abundantly.

And after them there came in the priests themselves of Jupiter, arrayed in the white garments of sacrifice, walking two by two, the oldest and principal of them coming last. And behind them again were certain younger assistants, clothed also in white, who led by a cord of silk inwrought with threads of silver a milk-white steer, without spot or blemish, whose horns were already gilt, and his broad brows crowned with oak-leaves and roses. And last of all entered the Vestal Virgins ; none of whom had ever before been seen by me, and they also walked two by two ; and no one could contemplate without veneration the majesty of their demeanour. With broad fillets were they bound around the forehead, and deep flowing veils hung down to their feet, entirely covering their faces and their hands ; nevertheless, their dignity was apparent ; and it was not the less impressive by reason of the great mystery in which all things about them appeared to be enveloped.

Imagine, therefore, to yourselves, how magnificent was the appearance of all things, when youths and damsels, and priests and Vestals, had taken their places according to the custom of their sacred observances ; and all that innumerable company of spectators yet standing up in the amphitheatre, the choral hymn was begun, in which every voice there was united, except only that of Thraso the Christian. Now, it was the soft low voices of the young maidens that sounded, and then these would pause and give place to the clearer and more piercing notes of the boys, that stood on the other side of the altar ; then

again the priestesses of Vesta would break in from afar with their equable harmony ; and anon, these in their turn ceasing, the Flamens of Jupiter would lift up their strong deep chanting, until, at the appointed signal from him that stood on the highest step of the altar, with the cup of libation in his hand, the whole people that were present burst in and joined in the rushing stream of the burden, "Jupiter, Jupiter, hear us ! hear us, father of gods and men !" while the wine was poured out, gushing red upon the marble, and the incense flung on high from fifty censers, rolled its waves of smoke all over the surface of the arena, and quite up to the gorgeous canopy of that resounding amphitheatre. Magnificent indeed was the spectacle, and majestic the music ; yet in the midst of it, how could I take away my eyes from the pale and solitary old man, by reason of whose presence alone all these things were so ? With calm eyes did he regard all the pageantry of those imperial rites ; with closed lips did he stand amid all the shouting multitudes. He bowed not his head ; he lifted not up his hand ; neither would he bend his knee, when the victim was slain before the horns of the altar ; neither would he in any thing give semblance of being a partaker in the worship.

At length the song ceased, and there was a proclamation again for deep silence ; and the prefect of the city, addressing himself once more to Thraso, said unto him, "Impious and unhappy man, with great clemency have all things been conducted as concerning thee. When, after long imprisonment and innumerable exhortations in private and in public, thou hadst always rejected every means of safety, and spurned from thee the pardon of those in whose hands thy being is placed, yet, notwithstanding of all thine obstinacy and continual rebellion, was it determined that, in the face of all the people, thou shouldst once more have free grace offered to thee, provided only thou shouldst, when all the assembly worshipped, join thy voice with them, and bow thy head also towards the altar of Jupiter. Nevertheless, all that now hear me shall bear witness, that with open and visible contumacy thou hast rejected this opportunity also, of being reconciled unto the prince and the empire ; that,

when every knee was bent, and every voice lifted up, thou alone hast stood upright, and thy lips alone have been closed. If it be so that, from some inflicted rather than voluntary perversion of mind, thou hast never yet been able to understand the danger in which thou art placed, know now, that there remains no hope at all for thee, except for a moment ; and let the strong fear of death open thine eyes, that thou mayst see where thou art, and for what purpose thou hast been brought hither. Thou art a born subject of Rome, and thy life can only be held by thee in virtue of obedience to the laws of the prince and the senate. These laws are clearer and more distinct upon nothing than the necessity that all men should acknowledge the deities of Rome ; and of good reason, since if they be despised and their authority set at naught, by what means shall an oath be ratified, or a pledge given ? or how may the head, which counsels and protects, be assured that the members shall not be lifted up against it ? Let silence remain in the assembly, and let Thraso of Antioch make his election, whether he will give obedience to the laws, or suffer the penalty of their transgression."

Then the prefect, and all those round about Trajan, sat down, and there was a deep silence throughout the lower region of the amphitheatre, where for the most part they of condition were placed ; but when the rabble, that sat above, beheld the stern and resolute countenance with which the old man stood there upon the arena, it seemed as if they were enraged thereby beyond measure, and there arose among them a fierce uproar, and a shouting of hatred ; and, amid groans and hisses, there was a cry from innumerable voices, of "Christian ! Christian !—Blasphemer ! Blasphemer !—Atheist ! Atheist !—A tiger ! A tiger ! Let loose a tiger upon the Christian !"

Nevertheless, the old man preserved unmoved the steadfastness of his demeanour, and lifting up his eyes to the place from whence the tumult proceeded, regarded the ferocious multitude with a visage, not of anger, or of scornfulness, but rather of pity, and of calmness ; inso-much that I perceived the nobles and senators were somewhat ashamed of the outcry, and the prefect of the

city arose from his place, and beckoned with his hand, until the people were weary of shouting, and order was in some measure re-established in the amphitheatre.

Then Thraso, perceiving that silence once more prevailed, lifted up his hand, and bowed himself before Trajan, and the great men of authority that were near to his chair, and said, with a firm clear voice, in the Roman tongue, "My name, O Trajan, is Thraso—the son of Androboulos. I am a native of Antioch, in Syria, and have in all things, except only in what pertains to this cause, observed throughout all the years of my life the statutes of the empire, as they by whose accusation I have been led hither shall themselves be constrained to bear abundant witness for me this day. My father was a Greek of Macedonian extraction, being descended from one of those that came to Syria beneath the banners of the great king Seleucus: but he took to wife a maiden of the Hebrew nation, and in process of time became a proselyte to the faith of her fathers. Nevertheless, he lived in trust and honour beneath the governors appointed by those that were before you in the empire, and brought up me and all his children to reverence, in all things that are lawful, the authority of Cesar. But as to the faith of the true God, whose worshippers ye blindly and foolishly call atheists and blasphemers, from that he neither swerved himself, nor would permit any of those that were in his household to depart. Now, when he had been a dweller for some time in Jerusalem, the great city of the Jews, he began to examine into those things which were reported publicly concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who is also called the Christ, of which things not a few that had been eye-witnesses, were then living in that city. And when he had been satisfied from their testimony that those miracles, of which you have all heard, were in truth performed in the sight of the people by Jesus of Nazareth, and had listened unto the words of their teachers, and saw how they proved that the old prophets of the Hebrews had foretold those wonderful works, he perceived that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Christ of God, and the great deliverer that had been promised to that people, even from the time of the patriarchs, and the beginning.

of their nation. And he believed on him with all his household ; and I also, from a stripling, have, although unworthy, been a Christian ; for by that name were they first called in Antioch, the city of my birth.

“ But being brought into trouble by reason of his religion, which the rulers of the Jews abhorred, my father departed after a time, from Jerusalem, and dwelt with my mother in one of the villages of Palestine, until his death. Not long after which time, the Jews rebelled against Cesar, and the great war began, which terminated in the overthrow of Jerusalem, and the utter ruin of their nation. Now, when Vespasian first came with his army into those regions, I, being without employment in the place where we had our habitation, and having, moreover, taken up a great, and perhaps a sinful, wrath against the Jews, on account of the sufferings which my father had undergone among them, and of the evils which, at their hands, our whole household had sustained, joined myself to one of the bands of Syrian auxiliaries ; and although my mother entreated me, I could not be persuaded to refrain from following the camp of Cesar along with them. Of which thing it has often since then repented me, and in which, it may be, I still hold myself not to have done altogether as was right ; for if the Jews had offended Cesar, it was, indeed, a reasonable thing that Cesar should visit them with his vengeance ; but, peradventure, it behooved not any of them that were descended from the fathers of that people, to take part in the warfare. Nevertheless, being then young, and full of life, and, as I have said, irritated by the sense of domestic injuries, I scrupled not to fulfil in all things the duty of a true soldier, and followed the eagles of Vespasian and his son, even to the day when the lines were drawn around the Holy City ; and it was manifest, that the war could have no end, but in the eternal overthrow of the power of the Jews. Neither did the length of the siege weary me, or produce within me any sort of unwillingness ; but, on the contrary, so long as the city was beleaguered, I remained with the band in which I had numbered myself, and did in all things such service as my strength would permit. Even among the soldiers that have guarded my prison, since I

was led into Rome for the sake of that accusation which has been brought against me in the matter of my belief, even among them, I have seen the faces of some that were my comrades in that fierce war, and that long beleaguement, who also, if they be commanded, will not refuse to bear testimony before you, that all these are true, even as I have said, and that I was a faithful soldier, both of Vespasian and of Titus, unto the last. Neither, indeed, did I lay down arms immediately when Jerusalem had been sacked, and the temple burnt, according to the prediction of Christ, but went with Cesar along the seacoast, and was present with him all through the journeyings he made in Egypt, even to the day when he made his great festival at Alexandria, and crowned the ox Apis with his own hands, in the presence of all that people. On which day it was, that, for the first time, I also was accused of being a Christian, and at the command of Titus himself was interrogated by one of the rulers of the army.

“Now with shame and confusion of face must I acknowledge, that on that day I, from desire of life, forgot myself utterly, and being deserted of all steadfastness, went up to the altar in presence of my judge, and offered gifts there to one of the idols of the Egyptians, whereon I was declared free of all blame; and even received honour and commendation thereafter from them, on account of my services in the war. But, from that day, my spirit sunk within me, and I knew not what to do, by reason of the sorrow that came upon me for that which I had done; insomuch that I grew weary of all things, and determined to leave the band in which I was serving, that I might seek out, if it were possible, the habitation of my mother, and make atonement in secret for the wickedness of which I, unhappy and fearful man, had been guilty at Alexandria. Being absolved, therefore, from my oath of service, on account of the length of time I had remained with the army, I departed from Egypt, and, after a time, found out my mother where she was dwelling in the mountainous country of Palestine, to the north of Jerusalem. In going thither, however, I was constrained to pass by the place where I had so long lain in your camp, O Romans! and to look with my own

eyes on the sorrowful desolation of that ancient city, where so many holy prophets of the Hebrews had ministered, and so many great kings reigned, in the days of the old time, when their nation flourished and was chosen and favoured of the Almighty. And it was then, indeed, that I first began to repent me of having been present in the host of Titus, and of having had a part in that terrible destruction; to which, when I added the recollection of my own miserable timorousness, when I was accused, by reason of the faith that was in me, at Alexandria—of a surety, great was my perplexity, and I fled across the mountains with much speed, seeking in vain to fly from the stings and perpetual torment of my own meditations, which nevertheless continued even more and more to sink into my spirit; insomuch that when I came into the place where my mother was dwelling, scarcely could she recognise me, wasted and worn as I was with that perpetual misery of shame and repentance. Without reproaches, however, and indeed with great kindness, did she receive me into her habitation, even although, as I have said, she had been much offended with me because of my going up to the beleaguerment of the city of her fathers. But when I, being humbled, made confession to her and her household, and to all the faithful that were in that place, of the grievous sin whereof I had been guilty in Egypt, both she and all the rest of them busied themselves continually to comfort me, and to assure me that there was yet hope, if my repentance were sincere, and my resolution immoveable never again to yield myself to any similar temptation. One of them also, that had been ordained of the disciples of Christ to minister in holy things among the scattered believers that dwelt up and down in that region, came not many days after to the same place, and having publicly heard my confession in presence of the church there, gave unto me absolution, and admitted me once more to be a partaker with them in the ordinances of the sanctuary. From which day, O Trajan! I have never again been so far deserted of myself as to fall back into that miserable error, or by any cowardly word of mine, to deny the faith that is in me, which is the faith of the true God,

that made heaven and earth, and of his son Jesus Christ, whom he sent into the world to teach loving-kindness, and long-suffering, and patience among all kindreds, and tongues, and nations of mankind ; and to make expiation, by the accursed death of the cross, for the evil and the wickedness that is in the world. From which faith should I now depart, out of terror for that which, by your command, may befall me in this place, of a surety no comfort could ever again come to me in my mind, for I should be bowed down, and utterly miserable, out of grief and shame ; which as you yourself, O Cesar, will admit and acknowledge, is far worse than death itself, or any evil which the body of man can sustain. Neither could I have any hope of being reconciled unto the true God, whom I should have so, once and again, denied ; insomuch that neither in life nor in death should I be able to have any happiness ; for in life, what happiness is there to him that is ashamed of himself ? and in departing from life, what comfort can be given to him that, knowing the truth, hath openly abjured the truth for the sake of a few, at the utmost, and these most miserable and unhappy years ? I am an old man, and my near kindred and my friends are already dead, so that poor after all, and not worthy to be mentioned, is the sacrifice on which I have this day resolved. And as for you, O Romans, should I now make shipwreck of my faith, and tell a lie to save my life before you, with what contempt would yourselves be constrained forthwith to look upon me ! Whosoever is wise among you, according to the philosophy of the earth, would utterly despise me ; and whosoever is brave and steadfast of spirit would think foul scorn that a soldier of Titus should be so much afraid to die. Therefore, O Trajan, am I resolved to endure all things rather than sacrifice to your gods ; and if such be your will, I will not refuse to die for this cause, to which witness has already been borne in Rome by the blood of so many apostles, and other noble martyrs of Christ."

The old man, having said these words, bowed himself once more reverently before Trajan, and then folding his arms in his cloak, appeared to await submissively, yet boldly, whatever might be appointed concerning him.

Steadfastly did I look upon his face at that moment, to see whether it might exhibit no traces of wavering, or at least, if pride barred irresolution, whether, nevertheless, there might not appear some token of natural sorrow and human unwillingness to die : yet in vain did I scrutinize and seek therein for any such symptoms of spiritual weakness ; for although it was visible that, with the exertion of so long standing and speaking, to say nothing of thought and anxiety, his bodily strength was much spent, still his eye preserved all its firmness, and his brow remained quite serene ; and the parched lips of the old man did not once betray the least shadow of trembling. Methinks I see him even now, as he then stood—his deep calm eyes sometimes turned upwards to Trajan, but for the most part bent downward to the ground, beneath those gray brows of his, whose dark shade rested upon his large solemn eyelids. Upon his broad front, as he stooped, no hair appeared, but long hoary ringlets, clustered down on either side, mingling with the venerable although dishevelled beard, that lay upon his bosom. Heroic meekness was enthroned visibly upon all his lineaments, and a murmur began to run through the assembly, as if—even in a Christian—it were not possible to contemplate such things without admiration.

But, as they afterward related to me—for I myself was not indeed sufficiently attentive to it—Trajan, who had as yet, during all the occurrences of the day, preserved unmoved the majestic serenity of his countenance, when he observed this last movement in the spirit of the assembly, began all at once to be very indignant, that such things should occur in such a place, in consequence of the appearance merely, and the language, of a culprit and a Christian. I confess it, that I was too much occupied with gazing on Thraso, to have any leisure for remarking the particulars of the deportment of any other person present—no, not even of Trajan himself ; yet such had been the effect produced on me by the history which the old man delivered of himself, that I indeed was not prepared at the moment to find the strong arm of power directed ruthlessly and immediately against him. At least, said I to myself, after such a statement as this, the prince will

institute an inquiry among all those now present in the capital who are likely to be able either to contradict essentially, or to confirm essentially, the narrative in which this man has thought fit to embody his only defence. Many years indeed have elapsed since the walls of Jerusalem were shattered by the engines of Rome, and the golden gate of its antique temple refused to be any protection against the furious soldiery of Titus. Yet surely not a few of such as were present in that proud host must be still in life ; yea, not a few of them must be now present in the capital of the world. The old spearman with whom I talked in the guard-room, and beside the ramparts underneath which Thraso was imprisoned, he surely cannot be the only witness that remains to give testimony to the truth of that which we have heard. He at least there is, and we shall forthwith have him at least confronted with Thraso.

Such were my own thoughts within me ; judge, therefore, what was my astonishment when I heard the trumpet sound, and perceived that its note, without any word being spoken, was at once received as a sufficient warning by the priests and the Vestals, and the youths and the damsels, and all those that had in any way been connected with the service of the altar, that had appeared on the arena, to retire from the place whereon they stood, and leave the old man there alone, to await the issue of his destiny. Immediately on the signal being given by the trumpet did all these begin to move away ; but although in silence they had at first marched into the amphitheatre, they did not retire from it in silence. Another hymn, on the contrary, in which also, as it seemed, different parts were allotted for each different order of singers, was begun to be sung by them even before they had moved from the arena ; and after the last of their procession had disappeared behind the wide folding-doors of the amphitheatre, we still heard their voices chanting solemnly until they had entered the great temple of Isis and Serapis, which, as I think, I have already said, stands over-against it, on the very brink of the Esquiline. And while all were yet listening to their singing, and to the divine harmony of lutes, and other sweet-sounding instruments, that accompanied their voices, the slaves, and

other attendants upon the duties of the place, removed every thing from the arena, except only the altar and statue of Jupiter, which were still left where they had been placed; insomuch that ere they had made an end of singing, and we of listening, the old man was left alone there as at the beginning, when he first came forth into the centre of the amphitheatre.

But just when deep silence once more prevailed all over the immense assembly, and expectation was most intense concerning what should be at length commanded by Trajan, it fell out so that a little bald ape escaped through the bars of one of the grated doors, which were along the boundary-wall of the arena, and leaping forth upon the sand, began to skip up and down, challenging by all manner of foolish gestures the attention of those that sat over-against it, leaning down from the parapet. And immediately certain painted courtesans, that were sitting not far from thence, with gilded breasts and bright coloured garlands, and all other gorgeous trappings of the degradation of harlotry, began to throw down apples and nuts to the obscene creature, and to testify much delight in the grimaces with which it received them, hopping to and fro, and casting them away, and then catching them up again, with continual gibbering and prating; and no sooner did the rabble that were above perceive these things, than they all, as with one consent, began to applaud and to shout loudly; insomuch that the vaulted vomitories and wide arches of entrance, and all the marble walls of the spacious amphitheatre, re-echoed in a moment with peals of laughter, and with every wild sound of carelessness and merriment. While, in the mean time, the African feeders and naked gladiators, and all those hangers-on of the amphitheatre whom we had seen in the dark places down below, hearing now the sounds that had arisen among the assembly, began to show themselves in crowds from behind the same grated doors through one of which the monkey had escaped, and to partake in the mirth of the spectators, and to whistle upon the creature, and to excite it to new caperings, by their outcries and jeerings; insomuch that it seemed as if the minds of all present were entirely occupied with the pranks of this brute; and

that almost it was forgotten amid the tumult, not only for what purpose all that solemn and stately pageantry of priests and Vestals had just been exhibited before them ; but even that such a being as Thraso was standing there upon the same arena, whereon that moping ape was diverting the multitude by its ridiculous gestures.

Now, for myself, who had never before looked upon any creature of this disgusting tribe, and had gathered only some¹ general notion of its appearance from the treatises of the physiologists, and the narratives of travellers, I could not, indeed, refuse to contemplate at first its motions with some curiosity and attention ; but of a truth I knew not, after the scene had lasted for a little space, whether to be more humbled within myself by the monkey's filthy mimickings of the form and attitudes of mankind, or by the display of brutish heartlessness which burst forth from all that countless multitude, while gazing on that spectacle of humiliation.

But it was not until my eye fell again on Thraso, who stood all this time solitary and silent amid the surrounding hubbub, that my sorrow and indignation were the greatest, and that I felt the deepest scorn for the minds of those that filled the amphitheatre around me. There stood the old man even as before, with his arms folded in his gown, and his eyes resting on the sand before him, pale, calm, and unmoved in his meekness, even as if his ears had not once received any sound of all the shoutings and the joyous laughers of that unpitying rabble, that had come there to behold him die. Once, indeed—it was but once—I thought I could perceive that a slight emotion of contempt wreathed for an instant his thin and bloodless lips ; but it seemed as if that were but the involuntary and momentary passing over him of one proud thought, and that he spurned it from him immediately, as a thing unworthy of the resolute and determined mind of his integrity, choosing rather to array himself in the divine armour of patience, than to oppose with any weapon of human passion the insults heaped upon his head by the cruel callousness of that degenerate congregation of men. And, whether it were so that the sight of all this did not affect me alone with such reflections, or only that they in author-

ity were afraid too much of the day might be occupied with what formed so unseemly an addition to the regular and ordained business of the assembly,—concerning this matter, I, indeed, cannot pretend to offer any conjecture ; but so it was, that while the uproar of mirth was yet at its height, certain of the lictors that were about the consular chairs leaped down into the arena, and beat the monkey back again among the feeders, and other base hirelings, that stood behind the grated doors of which I have spoken. Whereupon there was at once an end of the tumult, and the lictors having reascended to their places, the eyes of all men there present began once more to fix themselves upon Thraso the Christian.

And he also, when he perceived that it was so, and was sensible of the silence that once more prevailed, it seemed as if he too was aware that at last his appointed hour had come, and that he must needs prepare himself in good earnest for the abiding of the issue. For, instead of continuing steadfast in his place, as he had done during all the time he had as yet been exposed there, it appeared as if now at length, being swallowed up in the contemplation of his approaching fate, he had quite forgotten all the rules he had laid down to himself concerning his behaviour on the arena. Of a surety, I mean not to say that he had now lost remembrance of the courage which hitherto he had manifested,—or even that any the least symptom of changeableness was made visible upon his countenance. But it seemed to me, of a truth, that of such things as he had determined upon within himself before he came thither, touching the mere external demeanour of his bodily frame, the memory now, in this final moment of expectation, had somewhat passed away ; for Thraso stood still no longer on the centre of the arena ; but retaining his arms folded as they had been, and his eyes fixed upon the sand, he began to pace rapidly to and fro, in presence of all the multitude—traversing all the open space whereon he alone now was, from side to side, without so much as once looking up, or exhibiting any token that he was conscious of the presence of any man. By-and-by, nevertheless, in the deeper knittings of his brows, and the closer pressure of his extenuated lips, and then

again in the quivering of the nerves and muscles upon the arms and legs of the old man, as he moved to and fro before us, it was testified abundantly how keenly the spirit was at work within ; the strong soul wrestling, it may be, with some last stirring temptations of the flesh, and the mind itself not altogether refusing to betray its sympathy with the natural shudderings of the body. But the moment that the herald of Trajan commanded attention in the assembly, and that the prefect of the city, who had formerly spoken unto him, began again to prepare himself for speaking, that moment did the old man appear to return at once again entirely to himself ; and he fixed his eyes upon the prefect with even the same steadfastness as when he made his oration to Trajan, and the whole assembly of the people.

“ By all the gods,” whispered Sabinus at that moment into my ear,—“ by all the gods of Olympus, this old man is a true soldier of Vespasian and of Titus. He will die, Valerius, for this superstition, even with the constancy of a Roman.”

“ With all the constancy of a philosopher, say rather,” quoth Xerophrastes, who had overheard his whisper,—“ yea, with all the constancy of a philosopher. Of a surety, there must be some lessons of nobility in this faith of the Jews.”

“ Now speak not, but look at the old man,” interrupted Rubellia ; “ the signal is given for the executioner to come forth upon the arena.”

And I looked, and saw that the prefect of the city was standing up in his place, immediately below the chair of Trajan, and immediately he began to speak ; and he said, first looking towards the people, “ Let there be silence, and let no man stir in this place until this matter be ended.” And then addressing himself, as it seemed, to Thraso,—“ With all patience,” proceeded he, “ have the words which this man chose to utter in his defence been listened unto ; but it must be manifest to all men that they contain no shadow of apology, but rather afford the strongest confirmation of all that had before been alleged against him. Instead of departing from his error, or offering any extenuation of its magnitude, the words of his address

have tended only to show what was already well known to all that have had any dealings with the adherents of this blasphemous sect,—that their obstinacy is as great as their atheism is perverse, and that no clemency can, without blame, be extended to their wilfulness, neither to the scorn wherewith they are resolved to regard all things sacred. Nevertheless, inquiry has been made, and confirmation has been given by those who were present in the wars of the divine Titus, as to that which this man hath said concerning his own service in the Roman host, throughout the glorious campaign of Palestine, and the siege of the city of the Jews. For which service, it hath seemed right unto Cesar, ever-merciful, that no circumstance of needless shame be added unto the death by which this Christian must now expiate before all them who have seen his contempt of the sacrifice of Jupiter, and heard his words of blasphemy against all the gods, the guilt of which, it is manifest to all, he hath been justly and necessarily accused. Let those, therefore, who have been commanded to bring forth a tiger, depart now with their beast, and let this man be beheaded before the altar of Jupiter; after which, for this day, the assembly will disperse; for, until the morrow, the spectacle of the wild animals, which the prince hath prepared, must be deferred."

And when he had said so, the prefect made his obeisance again to Cesar, and sat down in his place; and immediately one of the doors of the arena was flung open, and there entered some slaves, bearing a wooden block upon their shoulders, behind whom followed also certain ill-favoured blacks, out of the company of African gladiators, one of whom carried bare in his hand a long and heavy sword, the surface of which glittered brightly as he moved, even as if it had been newly sharpened and burnished for the occasion. Seeing all which fatal preparations, Thraso immediately flung aside the long cloak in which hitherto his arms, and all his body, had been wrapped; and after regarding those that had come in for a moment with a steadfast eye, he turned himself to the place where the prefect was sitting, as if he had yet one word to say before he should submit himself unto the

sword of the African ; whereupon the prefect said, " If the prisoner hath yet any thing to offer, it is not too late for mercy—let him speak quickly."

" I have nothing more to offer, O Romans !" answered the old man, " as concerning that of which I have spoken before. But since already some favour has been extended to me by reason of my services in the army of Cesar, perhaps neither will this be refused,—that my body should be given to such as shall ask for it, that it may be treated without indignity after my soul is released from its habitation."

" It is granted," replied the prefect. " Is there any thing more ?"

" There is nothing," said the old man ; " this is all I had to ask of you."

With that, the block being already fixed upon the sand immediately in front of the altar of Jupiter, one of the Africans moved towards Thraso, as if to conduct him to the place where it behooved him to kneel ; but he, observing what was his intention, forthwith prevented him, and walked of himself steadily close up to him in whose hand the sword was unsheathed. Being come thither, the old man immediately took his station over-against the block, and having for a moment placed his hand upon his eyes, and moved his lips, as it seemed in fervent supplication, dropped his one knee on the ground, and stretched forth his neck towards the block ; but suddenly, after he had done so, he sprang again upon his feet, and began to gaze with a keen eye all around the assembly, as if he were in search of some one to whom he had something to say, the which he could not die without speaking. In vain, however, as it appeared, did he make this endeavour ; for after a little space, he shook his head despairingly, and gave over the steadfastness of his look. Nevertheless, he lifted up his voice, and, surveying once more the whole face of the amphitheatre round about, from side to side, said audibly, " There is one here who made last night a promise to me in my dungeon. I cannot see him where he is ; but I conjure him to take good heed, and execute, as he is a man and a Roman, all those things which he said to me he would do." Now when I heard him say so, I well knew within

myself that it was for me only his eye had been searching, and half did I arise from my seat, that he might see I was there, and observe my resolution to keep the faith I had plighted voluntarily to him in his prison. But Sabinus, who had not witnessed without attention the deep interest with which I had all along been contemplating the behaviour of the old man, called to mind, without difficulty, how he had left me the night before to do his errand to Thraso; and comprehending something of that which was meant, held me firm upon the bench, whispering at the same time, in an earnest manner, "As you regard me, Valerius, and as you regard your own safety, be still."

Being constrained after this manner, I neither rose up nor made any attempt to attract the attention of Thraso—for which forbearance, I confess to you, I have since that day undergone the visitation of not a few bitter thoughts,—but remained steadily in my place, while the old man once more addressed himself to kneel down upon the block that was before him. Calmly now at length did he kneel, and with much composure did he place himself. Yet, before the gladiator was ready to strike, he lifted up his head once again, and gazed upward for a moment towards heaven, with such a countenance of faith and hope, that there went through all the assembly a murmur, as it were, and a stirring breath of admiration. Then bowed he for the last time his gray hairs, and almost before he had rested his neck upon the tree, the strong sword of the African smote thereon with merciful fierceness, and the headless trunk falling backward upon the sand, the blood spouted forth in a gushing stream, and sprinkled all over with red drops the base of the statue of Jupiter Capitolinus, and the surface of the marble altar, whereupon the sacrifice of the Flamens had that day been offered.

The executioner, having made an end of his duty, forthwith wiped his sword from the blood of the Christian, and advancing towards the seats of the magistrates, claimed the largess that was due to him from the prince's bounty, by reason of that which he had done; which, when he had received, as is the custom, he and all his attendants withdrew immediately from the arena; the

emperor at the same moment, and the consulars, and all they that were about him, departing also themselves from the assembly; and the whole amphitheatre speedily being filled with the clamours of a universal upbreking and dispersion of that great multitude.

But as for us that had been sitting with Rubellia, we could by no means be prevailed with to accept of the lady's invitation to go home with her to supper in the Suburra; for the fatigue which had attended the gazing on so many and so various sorts of spectacles was not inconsiderable, and the day being already far spent, we were all willing to retire, as speedily as might be, to our respective places of abode. As for me, from Sabinus also, and Xerophrastes, and Sextus himself, I suddenly found myself separated, by reason of a sudden rushing among the crowd that surrounded the gates of the amphitheatre; so that after waiting there for a space, in expectation of being joined to them again, I perceived that I must of necessity return homeward entirely by myself.

Neither, after a moment, was I sorry that the thing had so fallen out; for, of a truth, the circumstances which had occurred in my presence had taken such possession of my mind, that I was sensible a short time spent by myself was very needful for the regaining of my usual manner of converse. Nay, so much was I occupied with those things, that even after having come as far as the arch of Titus, I could not refrain from turning back, and re-entering the walls of the amphitheatre, that I might once more behold the place on which that old man had died. But when I had come into the edifice, I found it now almost utterly deserted of all the multitudes that had filled it; insomuch that, walking over from bench to bench, my steps sounded as in a solitary place. I saw from a distance the body of Thraso still lying on the spot where it had fallen; but while I was yet looking thereon, and had some purpose to approach nearer, there entered, by one of the private passages, those friends of his to whom he had entreated that his body might be given. Three men and three women were all they that came for that mournful office; but both men and women of them had their faces wrapped in their garments, so that who they were,

neither I nor any one else could be permitted to discover. Having lifted up the body and the head, they placed them together reverently in a linen sheet, and then laying that upon an humble bier, they walked away with their sad burden, and disappeared from my view by the same postern through which they had entered at first upon the arena. But when they had gone away, the slaves of the edifice speedily came in, to put the sand, and all other things therein, in order; and seeing their labour commenced, I also was at length satisfied to take my final departure.

The sun had already been long gone down, ere I, filled with many melancholy meditations, and wellnigh spent utterly with the weariness of a sleepless night and a thoughtful day, reached at length the Martian Field, and entered once more the hospitable mansion of my kinsman.

CHAPTER XIV.

I SAW, my friends, that you listened with not less of indignation than of astonishment to the account which I yesterday gave you of a day spent in the amphitheatre of Vespasian. Neither did I expect that it should be otherwise with young persons of ingenuous minds, whose feelings have never been hardened by any personal experience of the life of Rome.

And yet, when you reflect a little more upon the matter, I think you will abate something of the wonder you manifested on hearing of the fondness of the Roman people for some of those cruel, ruthless spectacles. You will admit, at least, that there is a certain natural principle, on an exaggerated and morbid obedience to which, rather than on any total and absolute departure from the laws of our mind, much of that which excited so much of your astonishment and indignation also may be supposed to depend. In and by itself, I maintain it must always be a most interesting thing for a man to witness, in whatever

shape, the last moments of any human creature. Do not mistake me ; I mean not those merely corporal struggles, in which there must always be every thing to revolt, and nothing to interest, because in them, it is evident, the nobler part of our nature can have no share—the soul being already swallowed up, and its divinity absorbed in the intense convulsions of animal suffering. These are things on which no eyes can gaze willingly, without indicating the degradation of the spirit at whose bidding they are moved. But before that curtain falls beyond which every one must shudder to penetrate, there is a last terrible act of the real tragedy, which must ever have power to fix the eyes with an earnestness not the less deep because of its being preceded by some struggles of reluctance. We live in a state in which, however we may clothe ourselves with the armour of levity, or with the more effectual armour of occupation, it is impossible that the one fearful idea of dissolution should not ever and anon come to scare us with its terrors. We feel that we are walking over a soil, on the most level and the most rugged parts of which it is equally possible we may meet with the dark pit wherein it is our destiny to stumble. How sudden or how gradual soever the inevitable fall may be, we well know we shall have little enough space to prepare ourselves for the last leap, when we shall be fairly on the declivity ; and I maintain, once more, that it is a rational, no less than a natural, curiosity, which leads us to seek to supply, in some measure, this necessary defect, and to gather, if possible, from witnessing the last moments of others, some hints which may be of use to us, when our own dark hour shall come. We see a being standing on the edge of a precipice, to which the only thing we know certainly is, that we ourselves shall one day be brought ; and shall it be possible to feel no curiosity concerning the manner in which he conducts himself on that giddy brink ? That which is denied to us in our own person may, in part, be supplied in his ; and the eyes which dwell upon his features, while they are filled with the overwhelming expectation of near approaching death, make the closest approximation of which our nature admits to penetrating the actual mysteries of the unseen region. For my-

self, I shall confess without scruple, that both wiser and better did I come away from all that mournful spectacle.

But perhaps I am joining together things which, after all, had no necessary connection, when I ascribe to my contemplation of the death of Thraso, and the other cruel sights which, as it seemed, were regarded with indifference and heartlessness by the great multitudes around me, so much of the salutary change which, about this period, my own spirit underwent; a change of which you have already oftentimes heard me speak, and of which shortly you shall hear me speak more at length.

The slumbers which followed that busy day of novelties and terrors were long and heavy; for utterly worn out were both mind and body, and youth hastened to repair the waste of its energies, by drinking deeply at the great fountain of natural refreshment. Nevertheless, although the hand of sleep had lain steadily upon me, when I awoke in the already confirmed light of morning I found myself yet filled with a confused and tremulous sense of excitation, as if the spirit had disdained to be idle after having received so much food for activity, and fancy had still been garnishing the passive sphere of the night with aerial representations of all the gorgeous and solemn realities of the by-past day. I lay there ruminating amid the dispersing shadows of the mysterious world of dreams, and scarcely as yet aware that a whole night had passed since I had returned from the amphitheatre, when I was at length roused to a sudden and complete recollection of all things by the entrance of Boto.

"My dear master," said he, making a sort of start after he had come in, "I was afraid you would be angry with me for not coming to you sooner, but now I perceive you have been as lazy as the rest of us. Why, surely you are not aware what time of day it is! What would my dear old lady over the water say, if she heard of my young master lying in bed till within three hours of noon! Oh, what a place is this you have brought me to! Why, when I awake in the morning, the first thought that comes into my head always is, What, Boto, and is it really possible that all that wide roaring sea lies between you and the quiet green banks of Anton! Is it truth, good truth, and

neither dream nor witching, that you, *Boto*, are in *Rome* ! But I sometimes have to jump up and take a look out of the window before I am quite convinced ; and then, to be sure, I know well enough that I, who used always to dream about driving cattle to *Venta*, and perhaps kissing a *Brigian* lass by the way, could never dream so many fine things unless I were really among them. Good heavens ! what a heap of stories I shall have to tell, when we get safe back to old Britain !”

“ Indeed, *Boto*,” said I, “ you will be quite a travelled man. Be sure you do not give yourself too many airs on the occasion.”

“ Travelled man, in faith !” replied the clown. “ I should like to know, who it is that will be able to hold up his head with me when I am once fairly back again. Oh, how the old smith will be humbled ! He thought himself such a mighty person, because my old master, your father, had taken him with him as far as *Camulodunum*,* and how he used to brag of what he had seen there ; but now, I trow, Master *Pernorix* will be fain to talk quietly about his journeys. Oh, *Rome*, *Rome* ! what fine things shall I have to tell them all about *Rome*,—and the lions, and the monkeys, and the elephants, and the fighting-men, and the Christian, and the emperor, and all the wonderful sights we saw yesterday. But the worst of it is, that nobody will ever be able to believe one-half of what I shall tell them. And when does my dear Master *Valerius* think we shall be returning to my old lady, and all the rest of them in Britain ?”

“ Of a truth, good *Boto*,” said I, “ that is more than I can pretend to give you any notion of ; but I dare say, you shall have both time and opportunity to pick up a few more marvels still before we go. In the mean time, you are comfortable, I hope, in your quarters, and *Dromo* takes good heed of you ?”

“ *Dromo*,” quoth he, looking as arch as his massive features would admit of, “ *Dromo*, indeed ! If I had nobody to trust to but him, I should be very ill off. *Dromo* is a great man ; the young lord of the house has him up in his chamber every day to talk with him by himself ; and

* Either Colchester or Malden.

when he comes down again, or returns from any of the errands he is sent out upon, there is no bearing with him in the courtyard, where we are all huddled together. As for the overseer, old Sarcalus, the freedman, he has quite given him up. Nobody dare speak about whipping him; he looks upon himself as almost as important a person as his master, I believe, if the truth were known; and yet I should not complain, for, after all, it was Dromo that carried me yesterday to the amphitheatre."

"Ay, that was very kind of Dromo—I should have thought of it myself. And did he not see that you got your supper snugly, when you came back?"

"Ah! now, master, don't make them whip me—I see they have told you all."

"All!" said I,—“I do assure you they have told me nothing about you; but come, speak out. It must be something very bad that would make me think of having you whipped. You have been only three days in Rome—I shall make allowance for a few vagaries, provided they be not very extravagant.”

"Well, then, Master Valerius," quoth he, "since they have told you nothing beforehand, and you seem inclined to be so good-natured with me, I shall e'en tell you all myself; and I hope you won't think me, after all, very much to blame."

"Speak out, my honest Boto, and remember there is Dromo also to be examined, in case you keep any thing back from me."

"Ah! master, but Dromo would not be so easily caught as poor Boto. Dromo is a cunning man, and a close; and besides, they say he was born in a city they call Crete, and the people of that place can't speak a word of truth, even although they were willing. Do not think any thing at all about Dromo; but trust entirely to your own poor Boto, and he will tell you every thing. Dromo is a sad dog."

I know not what more he might have proceeded to say concerning Dromo, had not that crafty Cretan, who without question had been listening all the while behind the door, just at that moment glided in on very delicate tiptoe, and coming close up behind the British slave, as he stood in the act of haranguing me, smote him a smart fillip upon

the cheek with the back of his fingers, mimicking, at the same time, the broad British accent of the man, and repeating after him into his tingling ears the words, "*Dromo is a sad dog—Dromo is a cunning man, and a close—Dromo would not be so easily caught as poor Boto.*" "Ha, ha! Master Valerius," then said he to me, "and so you would really take the trouble to ask questions of this worthy man, when you had it in your power to send for me: I thought it had not been for nothing that three persons I could name entered upon a certain alliance—but 'tis all one to the Cretan. Both Sextus and you may manage your own affairs for yourselves, if such be your pleasure."

I knew not on this whether to be more amazed with the impudence of the Cretan or the confusion of poor Boto, who stood rubbing his cheek with a strangely mingled aspect of sheepishness and sulkiness; but Dromo soon put an end to the affair, by turning round with a face of admirably feigned astonishment to my Briton, and saying, "Good heavens! Boto, are you still there? Do you not perceive that your master and I have something to say to each other in private? Begone, my good man; shall I never be able to render you susceptible of the smallest polish?"

These last words, being accompanied with a gentle push on the back, soon expelled poor Boto, who, nevertheless, did not depart without casting towards me a look of woful appeal over his shoulder. But I, perceiving plainly, in the midst of all his frolicsome behaviour, that Dromo had really something to say to me, and suspecting, of course, that the interest of Sextus might be concerned in what he had to say, suffered my slave to withdraw in good earnest. Dromo, after the door was shut, laid his finger upon his lip, and stood still for a moment in an attitude of close attention; but the heavy heels of the reluctant Briton were heard with great distinctness, lumbering along the marble floor of the gallery; so, being satisfied that there was no eaves-dropping in the case, the varlet seated himself forthwith in a posture of great familiarity on the nether end of my couch, and, to judge from the expression of his countenance, seemed evidently to be preparing himself for a disclosure of some importance.

At length, after not a few winks of much intelligence, it was thus he began :—

“ You may hear Boto’s story, sir, at any time you please, and I dare say it will amuse you ; but in the mean time I must really have you attend to me, for, without jesting, things are by no means in so fair a train as I had thought for my young master ; and if something effectual be not speedily discovered, I am really at a loss to think how we shall be able to get out of our difficulties in such a manner as may be either satisfactory to him or creditable to my management. But you had better get up and dress yourself, and while you are doing so, I will tell you every thing.”

I did as he bade me, and then the Cretan proceeded : —“ As I was coming out of the amphitheatre yesterday, I happened to find myself rubbing shoulders with a certain old fat Calabrian, whom I had seen before about Rubellia’s house in the Suburra, and thinking that no harm could possibly come of being civil to him, I began immediately to ask his opinion of the spectacles. Whereon I wish you had been there to see how much he was delighted with the attention I paid him, and how he plumed himself on being admitted to talk on such subjects with such a person as me ; for the man himself is but an ignorant fellow, and seems never to have kept company but with the grooms and hinds. From less to more, we began to be the greatest friends in the world ; and by the time we got to the arch, it was evident that we could not possibly part without having a glass together to cement the acquaintance. Well, we were just about to dive into one of the wine-cellars there, below the gateway, when I saw your friend Boto standing by himself in the middle of the street, apparently quite agaze and bewildered, and not able to form the smallest guess which way he ought to take in order to reach home ; and being a good-natured fellow, in spite of all that has been said, I immediately shouted out his name till he was compelled to hear me, and then beckoned to him to come along with us, which indeed he did without much coaxing.”

“ Well, Dromo,” said I, “ and so all your great news is, that you have been leading my Briton into one of your

debauches? In truth, I think you need not have made such an affectation of mystery withal."

"Stop now," quoth he, cutting me short; "if the slave be too slow, I am sure the master's quickness will make up for it. Hear me out before you begin commenting; such interruptions would bring the Stagyrite himself to a stand:—we were soon, all three of us, seated in one of those snug little places, which if you have not yet seen, you are ignorant of the most comfortable sight within all the four walls of Rome,—a quiet cleanly little place, just big enough for the company,—three good hassocks upon the floor, a handful of sausages, and a plate of dried fish as broad as the shield of Ajax, and a good old-fashioned round-bellied jolly jug of Surrentine in the midst of us. I dare say, there were a hundred besides employed in the same way in the house; but we shut the door, and were as private as behind the altar of Vesta."

"A tempting scene, Dromo; and what use did you make of your privacy?"

"All in good time,—all in good time, Master Valerius; you would have the apple before the egg, if one would indulge you, I think. We had scarcely emptied our first jug, ere the conversation between the Calabrian and me took a turn that was not quite unnatural; for slaves, however little you may trust them, will always be smelling out something of the truth; and you may be sure all this visiting, and feasting, and riding about in chariots, and sitting together at the amphitheatre, has not been going on without causing a good deal of talk both in this house and the Lady Rubellia's. The courtship was of course the subject of our conversation, and I, pretending to know nothing of it myself, except from the common report of the slaves about our house, affected to consider it as highly probable that the fat Calabrian might have had much better opportunities than mine of being informed how the affair really stood."

"And did he really seem to have any knowledge about it?" said I.

"Not much—not much; but still the man did tell me something that I think may turn out to be well worth the knowing. I am sure, said I (by this time Boto was fast

asleep)—I am sure, if Rubellia won't have my young master, it won't be for want of presents; for we all know he has already given her a whole casket of rings and bracelets that belonged to his mother, and he is sitting for his picture, which, they say, he is to give her besides. So much said I.

“‘And I am sure,’ quoth the Calabrian in return, ‘that if your young master don’t have my lady, it won’t be for want of presents neither; for she is the most generous, open-handed lady in the world, and that her worst enemies will allow, although her father be an old rogue, and a usurer, as all the town says he is. No, Dromo,’ continued he, ‘nor will it be for want of filters, nor of charms, nor of any thing that soothsaying can procure; for, between ourselves, my lady keeps up a constant traffic of late with all that sort of gentry; and what the issue of it all may be, Hecate only knows.’ Now, my dear Master Valerius, when I heard him speak of filters and charms, you may be sure I began to quicken up my ears more keenly than ever.”

“Poh! poh! Dromo,” said I; “you are not serious. You do not mean surely to make me think that you believe in the efficacy of love-potions, or any such quackeries as these?”

“Quackeries! do you call filters quackeries? Why, there was a girl once gave myself a filter that kept me raving for six months.”

“What sort of a looking girl was she, good Dromo?”

“Bah!” quoth he; “that’s all utter nonsense. I see well enough what you are thinking of; but don’t expect to drive me out of memory as well as judgment by any of your jeering. Heavens and earth! when did anybody ever hear of anybody denying the efficacy of filters? What an atheistical sort of barbarians those Britons must be that you have been living among! By Jupiter, if you had suffered as much from filters as I have done, you would be a little more shy of talking so contemptuously about them. I wonder you are not afraid of some evil coming upon you. Remember Dian’s handful; remember the fate of Actæon!”

“Good Dromo,” said I, “I suppose you also suffered
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from peeping. But talk seriously, are you yourself a dealer in filters, that you are so anxious I should believe in their power? Or what is your meaning?"

"My meaning," quoth he, with great vehemence of utterance, and smiting his forehead as he spoke,—“my meaning, Master Valerius, is just this, that if Rubellia gives Sextus such another filter as a certain cunning little damsel gave me, before I left the pleasant island of Crete, to be a drudge and a packhorse here in Rome, where a man may sweat all his life in another's service, without being once thanked for his pains, and perhaps be laid out, look ye, for a supper to the vultures at last, because nobody will treat his carcass to a blaze of old sticks,—I say, that if the Lady Rubellia contrives to give Sextus such another filter as that, the game's up, Master Valerius; and we may as well set about painting the dead, as try to save him from her clutches. The man's gone—he's as lost as Troy.”

“Well, well, Dromo,” said I, for I perceived there was no use in fighting it with him, “and have you not been able to hit upon any feasible scheme for averting this horrible filter?”

“Ay, have you come to that at last? that is just what I have been cudgelling my brains about, half of the time drunk, and half of it sober, for the last twelve hours. But if I do hit upon any thing, I shall need assistance. In such cases, the best judgment can do nothing by itself.”

“Fear not, my dear Dromo,” quoth I; “if my assistance can do you any good, you well know you can command it to the utmost.”

“Then prepare,” replied the Cretan, rising up with an air of much solemnity—“then prepare in good earnest; for, may Cerberus growl upon me, if I don't find out some scheme before another day goes over, and show you all what stuff I am made of. Impudent baggage, forsooth, to think of entrapping Sextus without consulting Dromo!—No, by Cretan Jove, she shall not accomplish it—no, not even with a sea of filters.”

“And, in the mean time,” said I, “what must Sextus do with himself?”

“He must not go near the Suburra; he must remain

closely at home ; and as for tasting any thing at her house, or any thing that comes from her—by heavens, if he does not take his oath against that, we may as well leave him to his destiny. If he will but take good care for this one day, I think there is every chance something may be hit upon ere the morning. I have got my cue, and shall not be idle, I promise you ; but I undertake nothing unless you swear to keep Sextus safe, and at a distance from her, till nightfall."

"Good Dromo," said I, "make yourself easy on that score ; it will be a new circumstance indeed if we find any difficulty in persuading Sextus to stay a single day away from the Suburra."

"*Persuading !*" quoth the slave ; "who ever heard of such a word as *persuasion* at such a crisis as this ? I tell you what it is, he *must* be kept away ; and if no other plan can be fallen on, I have a great mind to turn the key on him and his pedagogue both together. I heard them hammering at their lessons already as I came along ; and that puts me in mind that I have a very shrewd notion there is more between that bearded goat of ours and this Rubellia, than any of us had been suspecting. Unless that Calabrian lies—and I think lying is above his sphere—this old rogue has been oftener in the Suburra of late than we had any thought of. So help me Hermes ! I believe Licinius has been employing him to go his private messages to Rubellia—but that is only one insult more, and I shall have my revenge all in a lump."

"I think it very likely," answered I, quite quietly, "that Licinius may have been employing Xerophrastes in some such embassies as these ; and if I mistake not the matter, he would feel himself quite as much in his element trotting along the Sacred Way, and so forth, on such errands for the father, as in expounding those musty parchments of his to the son."

"No matter for all that," quoth Dromo, rubbing his hands ; "the more enemies the more glory. Would Miltiades have been pleased had the Spartans arrived ? Leave all to me—take you care only of Sextus, and I am not afraid for any reinforcement that rascally rhetorician may bring against me."

While he was saying so, the face of the Cretan ex-

hibited obvious symptoms of incipient glee ; and he concluded with snapping his fingers, and uttering a short keen whistle, such as you have heard from the lips of a hunter, when the dogs begin to bay around the thicket in which he suspects the boar has his lair. Seeing him so ecstatically occupied with the expectation of some active and bustling scene, I could not help participating, in some measure, in the feelings of the Cretan myself. In short, I could scarcely look upon his dancing eyes and grinning lips, without being touched for the moment with something of the genuine spirit of your managing go-between ; and so, " Dear Dromo," said I, " I beseech you, if it be possible, let me have a share in whatever you resolve upon."

" Watch well," replied he, evidently much flattered—" watch well during the day, and you shall see what you shall see, when the moon mounts above the Cœlian, and the hour for grubbing among herbs and bones is come. But now I hear some one coming, and I think it is Licinius's own footsteps."

So saying, Dromo laid his finger once more on his lips, in token of secrecy, and glided from the room. Nor had his well-practised ears deceived him, for he had scarcely vanished into the gallery before my kinsman entered at the other side of the apartment.

" My dear Valerius," said he, saluting me affectionately, " I thought you were probably much fatigued with your spectacles, so I desired that nobody should call you this morning ; but I met Boto in the hall just now, and hearing from him that you were astir, I have come up to see you, for I wish particularly to have a little private conversation with you. If you have no objection, we will take a walk in the eastern portico, till such time as Xerophraustes leaves Sextus at liberty for the day."

So saying, Licinius led the way along the gallery to the place he had mentioned, and in passing we also heard the deep voice of the rhetorician resounding among the pillars, and could even catch a few of the magniloquent phrases with which he was feeding the ears of his pupil. " Ay, ay," quoth my kinsman as we went on, " I wish, indeed, it were possible to inspire the youth with some proper sense of what is due to the dignity of principle,

and how absurd it is to think of gratifying idle whims at the expense of the dictates of duty. But I fear the boy is incorrigible ; and alas ! Valerius, I am very sorry to say that I suspect you have been looking on his errors with a countenance rather of favour and of confirmation, than, as I should have expected from you beforehand, of rebuke."

"My dear sir," said I, "you know not how much you distress me. I could rather die than encourage Sextus in any thing I thought evil ; but, indeed, I have seen nothing to make me imagine him capable of following any such conduct."

"Come, by Hercules," returned he, "there is no occasion for so many words. I thought it very odd that you went away so soon from the Forum the other day, considering that you had never been there before ; but I thought it doubly and trebly remarkable that Sextus should have accompanied you, knowing, as he must have done, how much I, at all events, was interested in the affairs of Rubellia. But I have since found out that it was not the society of old Capito alone—no, my friend, nor yet the alarm of a thunder-storm, that detained you at the villa. In a word, Valerius, I strongly suspect that Sextus is carrying on an intrigue with a young lady whom I never saw, but who, I am quite sure, will never be heiress to fifty sesterces, and that is the true cause of his reluctance concerning a match which, to say nothing of the pleasure it would give to me, is the only means by which I can see any prospect of the young man's fortune being made, and the dignity of our family kept up, after another effigy shall have been added to the long series that already adorn our hall. Infatuated and headstrong boy ! if he owes nothing to himself or to me, is it possible that he can look upon that venerable line of sages and heroes, without feeling shame in the degradation of his own earth-stooping desires?"

"Without question, sir," said I, "you allude to the Lady Rubellia, whom, as I have heard from various quarters, you are desirous of seeing wedded to Sextus."

"Yes, Valerius, it is indeed to her I allude ; and it is of the obstacle which—unwittingly, I doubt not, and heed-

lessly—you yourself have been throwing in the way of that much-desired union, that I have now to make my complaint. Of a surety, such is not the service that I had expected from my British kinsman. Rubellia is descended from a noble family, and both in possession and expectation her wealth is great. Two heavy fines laid upon me by Domitian, and the expense at which I have maintained my rank among the great patrons of Rome, these things together have impoverished me, not indeed in a manner unworthy of the lineage from which I am sprung, but to an extent not altogether convenient. In this boy my earthly hopes were placed; and see you now how they are all likely to be blasted for the sake of a dimpled cheek, and a pair of wanton eyes! or rather, indeed, I should say, for the sake of the malignant pleasure that is derived from thwarting my purposes: for, if beauty were what the boy wanted, where should he find beauty to be compared with that of Rubellia? Indeed, Valerius, I should before this time have made you acquainted with my intentions from my own lips, and then I am sure there would have been no occasion for any such conversation as this." Then, after a pause, he continued, more sternly, "Of a surety it is my own foolish indulgence which has made my degenerate boy quite forget, not only what is the duty of a Roman son, but what is the power of a Roman father."

"Nay, Licinius," said I, interrupting him, "I trust there is no need for all this seriousness. Sextus, after all, has only just laid aside the garb of a stripling; certainly it is too much to be despairing of his success in life, only because he is unwilling, at a period so early, to enter upon a connection which, I am sure, you would be sorry to find him regarding in any other light than that of a permanent one. Is it possible that, if he really dislike Rubellia, you would wish to see him marry her—only to divorce her, without question, as soon as he should find it possible to do so without inconvenience?"

"Handsome, rich, noble, and almost as young as himself, why, in the name of all the gods, for what cause should he divorce Rubellia?"

"Sir," said I, "he loves not Rubellia, nor will ever love her; and if you cause your son to marry this woman, look you well to it, that the unhappiness of both rest not on your head. Handsome, rich, noble, and young she may be; but I am sure she has neither such a heart nor such a mind as should belong to the wife of your Sextus. A luxurious woman is Rubellia, and I have seen her find luxury in the contemplation of blood. Wed not Rubellia to your son."

"Peace, Valerius," he answered; "what boyish nonsense is this? I *will* wed Rubellia to my son; and let him see to it that he tempts me not further with his disobedience."

Licinius said these last words in a voice of so much earnestness, that I knew not well what answer to make to him; but just while I was hesitating, there came to the place where we were walking among the statues, one of the little boys that were about the house (I mean the children of the domestic slaves), who, making his obeisance to Licinius, said, "If it please my lord, the same senator that was here in the morning has returned with two others, and is waiting in the hall."

"Oh! Pontius Mamurra again, I suppose," quoth the orator, and so left me without saying another word; some other business, as it seemed, having immediately recurred to occupy his attention.

But I, for my part, when I heard the name of the visitor, began to understand somewhat of the channel through which my kinsman had been informed concerning what had passed at the suburban of Velius Capito.

CHAPTER XV.

I HAD no leisure, however, to reflect long upon this hint; for, on coming to my own apartment, I found Sextus waiting there for me, who said, immediately on my entrance, "Come, Valerius, I have been looking for you

all over the house, and I was just about to set off without you. My father has been looking on me this morning with such an aspect of displeasure as I never before witnessed in him, and I know, that if I defer going to the painter, whom he has commanded to execute my likeness, he will be altogether enraged against me at supper-time. I know very well he means the ring, in which it is to be placed, for another present to Rubellia ; but notwithstanding, what can I do ? Any opposition to him in lesser matters would only tend to bring on some final explanation about the great affair itself, and that, whether it be weakness in me or not, I as yet have no courage to encounter. Come along, the man must be expecting me about this time, and there is no use in keeping him idle, since ~~go~~ I must ; and as for you, I am sure you will accompany me, for I have much need of you to keep up my heart during so odious a business. Xerophrastes, indeed," he continued, "has been desired to go along with me ; but he will be no comfort, for I see plainly, from the drift of his harangues this morning, that he also is enlisted against me. My dear Valerius, I have nobody in the whole world I can trust to but Dromo and yourself."

He had scarcely said so, when we heard Xerophrastes pacing up and down with solemn strides in the gallery ; so I knew not how to excuse myself, although I was very anxious to have staid at home for another purpose, of which I shall speak to you anon. Young Sextus, meanwhile, had taken down my gown from the nail, and he threw it over my shoulders before I had time to say any thing ; and, in a word, the whole three of us were soon on our way to the place of my young friend's ungrateful destination.

In order to arrive at this place, however, we had a considerable part of the city to move over ; for I found that this painter was one of those who exercise their art during the public hours of the day in the baths of the Palatine, where, as you have heard, in the wide circuit of the princely residence, abundant accommodation is set forth for all such ingenious persons as choose to make use of it. We proceeded, therefore, along the edge of the

river, and by the west of the Capitol, following the line of that great Triumphal Way which has been witness of so many glorious pageants; for so, they told me, we should most easily ascend into the Cesarian courts. But when we had come thither, we found, very unexpectedly, that the whole of the open space in front of the portico and stairs of Trajan was occupied by a detachment of the Prætorian cohorts, who were drawn up there in splendid array to receive some promised donative from the bounty of the prince; while the martial music, and the clamours of their mustering, had collected all around them enough of spectators to render the passage onward in some measure difficult. We also by this means were constrained to form part of their attendance, and stood there gazing patiently among the multitude, till such time as they should disperse. Neither was it, in truth, possible for me altogether to lament this interruption; for the sun shone brightly upon the crests and the spears, and the silver eagles glittered here and there resplendently above the heads of the warriors, and the horses of the tribunes pawed the ground proudly when the horns were sounding, and the deep silence along the armed line contrasted nobly with the hum and tumult of the admiring assemblage; and even the eyes of the stately Xerophrates caught some animation from the brilliancy of the spectacle before him; and the enamoured and perplexed Sextus himself, beating time on my shoulder to the notes of the trumpet, seemed to have forgotten for a moment all the anxieties of his situation.

Some horsemen, however, riding along to keep the ground open in front of the soldiery, compelled us to shift our places more to the eastward, where many chariots were drawn up, and in one of these I ere long discovered Rubellia sitting by herself. The lady looked paler by far than I had ever before seen her, and had not the air of being in the smallest degree occupied with what was passing. But I, for my part, did not think it necessary to take any notice of her being there to either of my companions, and was willing, indeed, to keep myself turned away from the place where she sat, in order to avoid any chance of being recognised by her. Yet there was some-

thing in the aspect of her countenance, and in the troubled air of her whole attitude, that in spite of myself prevented me from doing so, and, as it were by a sort of fascination, drew my eyes to the spot that I wished most to avoid. From time to time, therefore, I felt myself constrained to regard the melancholy lady; and I had not turned round often for that purpose before Sextus also perceived what it was that attracted my attention—so I discovered sufficiently, although he said not a word, from the fervent pressure with which his fingers suddenly began to lean upon my arm as I stood before him. And at that moment there drew near to the place where her chariot stood a certain little ugly old woman, with no covering upon her head but long coarse gray clusters of hair hanging matted and twisted all down upon her shoulders, who immediately lifted up a basket of trinkets she had on her arm, and presented it to Rubellia, as if to solicit her to purchase something out of it; but no sooner did Rubellia perceive the basket thrust into her chariot, than she started on her seat, and looking in the face of the old creature, manifested immediately many signs of no trivial emotion; for her colour, which, as I have told you, had that day quite departed from her, now returned with a sudden and strong flush into her cheeks, and her dim eyes recovered all their animation, and her lips trembled after such a fashion that it was evident she had something to say which could not possibly regard the gaudy ornaments that were offered to her view in the basket. Whatever it was, however, that she had to say, she did not occupy much time in saying it; for scarcely a minute had elapsed before the basket was lowered again, and the old woman, after whispering something into the ear of the lady, began to move away from her towards another part of the crowd, after which Rubellia sunk back again immediately into the corner of her chariot, and appeared to relapse into much of the same pensive abstraction from which the old woman's visit had disturbed her.

But many moments had not gone ere I heard a low voice croaking out, "Rings, rings,—amulets and rings!" among the crowd that stood immediately behind me; and,

looking over my shoulder, I perceived the same old woman with the long gray clusters of hair, already standing close beside us, and pushing forward between Xerophrates and Sextus the same basket which had been thrust into the chariot of Rubellia. There was a certain wild and outlandish leer upon the tawny countenance of the woman that, I know not how, affected me with something that was neither fear nor curiosity, but a strange mixture of both; so that at one moment my impulse was to interpose some part of the bystanding multitude between me and her, and the next, I could scarcely help moving towards her more nearly than was necessary. But it seemed as if neither to me nor to Xerophrates was she ambitious of vending her wares, for she took not the least notice of either of us, nor indeed of any others that were near her, except only the young Sextus, whom she began coaxing to buy of her, with all that flow of cunning and low adulation which comes so naturally from the lips of such itinerants.

"My noble youth," quoth the hag, "my noble, lovely, beautiful young gentleman—my sweet Adonis, my charming lord, do now look into old Pona's basket—poor old Ponula!—do take a look at Ponula's rings and amulets—her amulets and rings. Here is one that I could have sold a hundred times for all that it is worth, but I was determined to keep it till I should see the prettiest young gentleman in Rome, and I never will go back to Naples without selling it, after this day; for this beautiful little amulet must be nobody's but yours. You will break my heart, my lovely prince, if you don't buy my beautiful little amulet."

"And what," said he, blushing and laughing, "may be the virtues of your amulet?"

"Virtues of my amulet!" she replied, twisting her old seamed lips into a faint and fawnish simper; "do you ask what are the virtues of my amulet? Of a surety you shall know them;" then laying her yellow hand upon his shoulder, till she had made him stoop down so that she might get close to his ear, and sinking her voice into a whisper, she began to pour out, with much mysterious volubility, all the story of its marvellous potencies: but what she said even I could not know, only I heard the

words, "Ethiopian, Ethiopian," and "Memnon, Memnon," and something about "not a pretty lady in Rome"—and a few more disjointed fragments, of which it was not possible for me to make any sense. But just as the woman was most earnest in her whisper, and Sextus, apparently at least, in listening to it, I found my gown plucked hastily from behind; and behold, there was Dromo, with a countenance quite tremulously agitated, and all over as white as a piece of dead parchment, pointing to his young master and the old hag, and beseeching me to separate them, by motions which were in nowise to be mistaken. How he had come thither, or what was the cause of all his anxiety, I had no time to conjecture, for before I could say a word, he began to bellow out,—“The horses, the horses—make room there for the horses;” and immediately those that stood near him began to move a little, and then, the cry being repeated, those that stood farther off mistaking the noise of their feet for that of the actual approach of some new squadron, there arose altogether a sort of rushing among the crowd; and in a twinkling the voice of Pona was heard grumbling and croaking at a distance from the place to which our party were borne by the current of its multitudes. Close, nevertheless, did the faithful Cretan stick to us; and no sooner was quiet in some measure restored, and the false alarm he had created at an end, than he whispered into my ear, “For the sake of all that is sacred, let not that foul hag speak another word to my young master—I will tell you more anon. Meantime, haste ye, haste ye. Make the best of your speed to the Palatine; it will be much easier for you to push your way thither than it was for me to come where you are.”

Nor was he satisfied with indicating all this by words alone, but pointing with his finger to a place where there really was some appearance of an opening, he continued, by every fervent gesture in his power, to impress on me the necessity of immediately obeying his directions; and how to account for this I know not, but indeed there was something in the earnestness of Dromo's manner which I found it quite impossible to resist; insomuch that even, I believe, without so much display of zeal, he might have

accomplished his purpose with me. At all events, the way needed only to be pointed out in order to its being followed by Sextus and Xerophrastes, who were already weary of the heat and the pressure of the multitude; so we were all soon in motion towards the region of which the Cretan had given us notice. It so happened, however, that in the same commotion which had removed us from one part of the crowd to another, the chariot of Rubellia also had changed its situation; for just as we had escaped, as we thought, from all the tumult, and were about to place our feet on the first step of that great and magnificent flight of stairs that leads up from the new way to the Augustan Towers, there came to us a lad of that lady's household, who told us his mistress was near at hand, and desirous, if it so pleased us, of our company. So invited, and being aware that we were in sight of Rubellia, what could be done but to follow her bidding? and we did so accordingly, in spite of all Dromo's warnings to me—nay, I say yet further, in spite of our own inclinations. We found the lady in her chariot, but not such as we had seen her before. On the contrary, whether or not the sight of Sextus had produced the change, the whole liveliness of her aspect seemed now to be completely restored to her, and she received us, as it appeared, with all her usual gayety of address. "Careless men," said she, as we drew near; "I suppose I might have sat here till the Greek Kalends, before any one of you would have observed me."

"Most noble lady," quoth Xerophrastes, "bear it not indignantly, that amid all the confusion of men and horses, and trumpets and shoutings, our attention was abstracted from that which was really most worthy of our notice; of a surety, my young friends deserve to be excused, since even I, who am not in the habit of being much troubled by such vanities, was myself so much bewildered that I scarcely knew my right hand from my left, in this human chaos. Pardon us, most noble Rubellia; we have been unwitting offenders."

"I believe it—I believe it," replied the lady, not once looking at the stoic. "But I did not call for you to hear useless apologies. What new sight is it that attracts you

to the Palatine? or is it only that you are desirous of exhibiting to Valerius the old established wonders of the place? In either case, I have half a mind to accompany you. In spite of all they tell us about the Golden House, I can scarcely think the Palatine can have shown more splendidly than it does now, even in the days of Nero."

"Indeed," said I, as we began to mount together the broad slabbed steps which rise up, tier above tier, in solid magnificence, from the portico that is on the street to that which hangs on the brow of the ascent, "Indeed, it is not easy for me to doubt that Rubellia is in the right." For now, on one side, were all the pillars and arches of the Forum stretched out below us, as in a picture; and on the other lay the stately sweep of the great Circus, topped with its obelisk; while right before, from above trees and temples, rose the gray cliffs of the Capitoline, with all their crown of domes and proud pinnacles glittering in the glow of the noontide. Imagine to yourselves the space between, all radiant with the arms and banners of those moving cohorts, and confess that my enthusiasm might have been pardoned, even had I been an old man, and less a stranger to spectacles of Roman magnificence. As it fell out, it was partaken by my companions; for even Xerophrastes did not refrain from some ejaculations of delight. "Great Rome! Illustrious, imperial Rome!" said the stoic, "how great is thy sublimity!" And then, after a pause of a moment or two, he repeated, in a voice of much majesty, those fine verses from the *Fury of Ajax* :—

Oh! might I be where o'er the living deep
Lies the broad shadow of the Sounian cliff,
Waving with all its glorious garniture
Of rock-sprung foliage: from old Ocean's side,
That I might look on Athens once again!*

But I confess to you, that at the moment some of the hints which had reached me concerning the real country of his nativity recurring to my recollection, I could not

* *Sop. Ajax.* 1235.

γεραιπας
'Is' *ὅταν εὖσι Πλοῖα, &c.*

help very wickedly echoing his Greek quotation with another from Virgil, about the wide tracts *ploughed* by the Thracians*—of which impertinence, however, the sage, lost in his own thoughts, took not or seemed not to take any notice.

Neither, of a truth, was my admiration diminished when, having gained the top of that massive staircase, or rather, as I should say, that grandiform hill of marble, we passed at length beneath the sounding portal, the sole remnant of the original pile of Augustus, and found ourselves within the first of those great imperial quadrangles by which the whole summit of that once so variously and multitudinously peopled region is now occupied. The light and airy formation of the porticoes all around me—the gracefulness of the pillars—the splendour of the domes—the sublimity of the princely towers—and the universal profusion of elaborate elegance in all things;—the marble, the brass, the ivory, and the flaming gold, everywhere lavished on arch, metope, and architrave—all conspired for a moment to dazzle my sight, and I stood still to gaze without disturbance on the wide vision of magnificence with which it had pleased the masters of the world to be surrounded.

“Behold,” said Sextus, “where those two equestrian statues of bronze are placed over against each other, on the left-hand—I have heard my father say that they mark the sites of two houses, which, in the old time, before Augustus began to enclose the whole Palatine in his walls, were inhabited, the one by Cicero, the other by Clodius, his enemy; but now these are all the traces that remain of their mansions.”

“In faith,” replied Rubellia, “your brazen equestrians are grim-looking riders enough; but yet, I dare say, they don’t cast half such fierce looks on each other as those two predecessors of theirs whom you have mentioned. I should like to have seen the countenance of old Tully, the morning he went down the hill to deliver his *harangue* for Milo.”

“Nay,” said I, “I am very glad that Sextus has told

* Vide *Æneid* III.

Thracæ arant, &c.

me this ; for I shall always, in reading those famous philippics in time to come, possess a new key to the bitterness of their phraseology, knowing, as I do, that the two lived just over the way from each other, and that the orator could every now and then, when his spirits were flagging, derive a new reinforcement of spleen from merely putting his head out of the window, and contemplating, if not the person, at least the habitation of his adversary."

"To hear you speak," quoth Rubellia, "one would think you were studying the art of making philippics yourself—I am afraid that, if it be so, my joining your party may prove to have been but an ill-judged thing for my own interests ; for, according to this theory, if any of you be preparing to abuse me, my presence will only serve to sharpen your weapons."

"Of a surety, however," interrupted the smiling Xerophrastes, "my noble lady will admit, that, in that case, the converse also will hold good, and that if praise be in meditation, it will not be the feeblest because the subject of the intended panegyric has passed before the eyes of the eulogist."

"Most courteous of men," replied the lady, "who will ever talk of the stiffness of the Porch, after the days of Xerophrastes ? To-day and yesterday you have paid me as many compliments as might give a lesson to the gayest trifler about the imperial baths here. If all," she continued (gazing, as she spoke, with all her eyes upon Sextus), "if all were as profuse, I should be unable to sustain the weight of their civilities."

"Nay, O generous lady," quoth the sage again, "it must be remembered, that, as the poet has expressed it, there are two kinds of shame—there is the wicked shame and the good shame. Why should it be doubted that a modest Verecundity, not unsuitable to their age, has laid her finger on the lips of our young friends ? I swear by the Victrix of Ida, that your presence itself is that which occasions their silence ; bear it not ill—bear it not harshly—the young will learn—it is not every one that has seen Corinth."

"No, truly," answered the laughing lady ; "but I doubt whether they that have been so fortunate have ever seen

any thing half so fine as we are just going to show to our friend Valerius—let us go at once to the temple.”

So saying, she pointed to the solemn Doric columns which sustain the portico of the famous temple of Apollo Palatinus, whose shade lay far out upon the marble court before us, and passing between those brazen horsemen of which we had been speaking, we soon began to ascend the steps that lead up to the shrine. Nor can I tell you how delightful was the fragrant coolness which reigned beneath the influence of that massive canopy of marble, to us whose eyes had been so long tasked with supporting the meridian blaze of the Italian sun, reflected from so many shining towers and glowing edifices. We entered with slow steps within the vestibule of the temple, and stood there for some space, enjoying in silence the soft breath of air that played around the flowing fountains of the god. Then passing on, the airy hall of the interior itself received us; and I saw the statue of Phœbus presiding, like a pillar of tender light, over the surrounding darkness of the vaulted place; for, to the lofty shrine of the god of day no light of day had access, and there lay only a small creeping flame burning thin upon his altar; but a dim and sweet radiance, like that of the stars in autumn, was diffused all upon the statue, and the altar, and the warlike trophies suspended on the inner recesses, from the sacred tree of silver that stands in the centre,—amid the trembling enamelled leaves and drooping boughs of which hung many lamps, after the shape and fashion of pomegranates—and out of every pomegranate there flowed a separate gleam of that soft light, supplied mysteriously through the tall stem of the silver tree, from beneath the hollow floor of the temple.

Now there was no one there when we first came into the place; but I had not half-satisfied myself with contemplating its beauties, when there advanced from behind the statue of Apollo a very majestic woman, arrayed in long white garments, and having a fillet of laurel leaves twined above her veil, where, parting on her forehead, its folds began to fall downward towards her girdle. Venerable and stately was her mien, but haughty, rather than serene, the aspect of her countenance. Without once

looking towards us, or the place where we stood, she went up immediately to the altar, and began to busy herself in trimming the sacred fire, which, as I have said, exhibited only a lambent and fleeting flame upon its surface. But when, with many kneelings and other ceremonies, she had accomplished this solitary service, the priestess of Apollo at length turned herself again, as if to depart into the secret place from whence she had come forth; and it was then, that first, as it seemed, observing the presence of strangers, she stood still before the altar, and regarding us attentively, began to recognise the Lady Rubellia, whom, forthwith advancing, she saluted courteously, and invited to come with the rest of us into her privacy, behind the shrine of the god.

So saying, she herself led the way thither, Rubellia walking immediately behind her, and the rest of us in her train. Through several folding-doors did we pass, and along many narrow passages all inlaid, on roof, wall, and floor, with snow-white alabaster and rich mosaic work, until at length we came to a little airy chamber, where three young maidens were sitting with their embroidering cushions, while one, taller than the rest, whose back was placed towards us, so that we saw not her countenance, was kneeling on the floor, and touching, with slow and mournful fingers, the strings of a Dorian lyre. Hearing the sound of her music as we entered, we stood still in the door-way, and the priestess, willing apparently that our approach should remain unknown, advancing a step or two before us, said, "Sing on, my love, I have trimmed the flame; sing on, I shall now be able to listen to all your song; but remember, I pray you, that the precincts of Phœbus are not those of Pluto, and let not your chant be of such funereal solemnity. Sing some gay thing—we solitaries have no need of depressing numbers."

"Dear aunt," replied she that had been thus addressed, without, however, changing her attitude, "you must even bear with my numbers such as they are; for if you bid me sing only merry strains, I am afraid neither voice nor fingers may be able well to obey you."

These words were spoken in a low and melancholy voice; but guess with what interest I heard them, when I

perceived that they proceeded from no other lips than those of Athanasia herself. Sextus also, on hearing them, knew well enough who she was that spoke; but when he looked at me to signify this, I motioned to the youth that he should say nothing to disturb her in her singing.

"Then please yourself," said the priestess, laying her hand on Athanasia's shoulders; "but do sing, for I should fain have my maidens to hear something truly of your music."

With that Athanasia again applied her fingers to the chords of the lyre, and stooping over them, began to play some notes of prelude, less sorrowful than what we had at first heard.

"Ay, my dear girl," says the priestess, "there now you have the very secret of that old Delian chant. Heavens! how many lordly choirs have I heard singing to it in unison. There are a hundred hymns that may be sung to it—give us whichsoever of them pleases your fancy the best."

"I will try," replied the maiden, "to sing the words you have heard from me before. If I remember me aright, you liked them."

Then boldly at once, yet gently, did her voice rush into the current of that old strain that you have heard so often; but it was then that I myself for the first time heard it.

The moon, the moon is thine, O night,
Not altogether dark art thou;
Her trembling crescent sheds its light,
Trembling and pale, upon thine ancient brow.

The moon is thine, and round her orb
A thousand sweet stars minister,
Whose twinkling rays dark wells absorb,
And all the wide seas drink them far and near

They kiss the wide sea, and swift smiles
Of gladness o'er the waters creep;
Old hoary rocks rejoice, and isles,
And there is glory on the slumbering deep.

Afar—along the black hill's side,
Right blithe of heart the wanderers go,
While that soft radiance, far and wide,
Gleams on the winding streams and woods below.

And gayly for the fragile bark,
Through the green waves its path is shorn,
When all the murmurs of the dark
Cold sea lie calm'd beneath that gliding horn

Yet hail, ye glittering streaks, that lie
The eastern mountain-tops upon !
Hail ye, deep blushes of the sky,
That speak the coming of the bridegroom sun !

Hail to the healing beam of day,
That rouses every living thing !
The forest gulfs confess thy sway,
And upon freshening branches glad birds sing.

And loathsome forms, that crept unseen
Beneath the star-light faint and wan,
Cower in their brakes the thorns between,
Dreading that fervid eye, and its sure scan

Triumphant. Welcome life and light !
Sing, rocks and mountains, plain and sea ;
Fearful, though lovely, was the night :
Hail to more perfect beauty—hail to **THEE** !

“ Why stop you, Athanasia ? ” said the priestess, finding that here she paused,—“ why do you rise up, and take your fingers from the lyre, before you sing out the chorus ? ”

“ No more, dear aunt—excuse me—no more. I have already sung all that I can,” replied Athanasia.

“ Nay, then,” says she, “ if you be fatigued, sing not ; but join me, maidens, in the close—perhaps it rises too high for Athanasia.”

And with that the ancient lady herself, joined by the three damsels who had been embroidering, took up the strain, which, indeed, rose higher towards its end.

Hail to thee, Phœbus, son of Jove,
Glorious Apollo, lord of light,
Hail, lovely in thy Delian grove,
And terrible on Delphos' haunted height !

Hail to thee here beneath the dome,
Great Phœbus, of thy Latian shrine ;
All hail from Cesar and from Rome ;
Hail by thy dearest name, God Palatine !

But as they were singing the last verse of all, Rubellia also aided their melody with a rich strong gushing voice,

which rose far above all the others ; and it was then, for the first time, that the silent Athanasia turned round quickly towards the place where we were standing, and perceived, not without manifestation of alarm, by how many strangers her song had been overheard. On seeing who we were, however, she immediately saluted Sextus and myself with her usual modest courtesy. Nevertheless, I could see very well that she blushed more deeply than ever when she did so ; and, indeed, I think both my companion and myself blushed at the same moment ; for he could not see Athanasia without thinking of Sempromia ; while I, for my part, after all that had passed, was not likely to be the more composed, because I thought of no one but the maiden herself.

It seemed that the recollection of having seen me, and the strong suspicion of having been recognised by me over-against the Prætorian guard-house, had thrown a certain air of trouble over Athanasia's demeanour ; for, after the first glance, I in vain endeavoured to meet her eye ; while, on the contrary, to Sextus she directed both looks and words enough to provoke visibly some not altogether benign movements in the proud spirit of Rubellia. Such, at least, was my interpretation of the luxurious widow's aspect, and of the tone of impatience in which she, after a minute or two had passed, began to urge the propriety of our proceeding to the part of the imperial edifice in which the painter was expecting us.

The priestess of Apollo, hearing her say so, courteously offered to guide us beyond the precincts of the temple, and our whole party were again in motion forthwith ; but Athanasia remained behind with the three young damsels, and I, who walked last, saw her, ere the portal received me, preparing again to handle the lyre, with fingers visibly trembling, and a pale countenance, not, as I thought, unstained with some yet more distinct traces of keen emotion. The sight of her agitation fixed my footstep for a moment, and it was then that, on her casting a sudden glance round to the place where I stood, I perceived truly that I had not been mistaken, and that the tears were indeed gathered within her eyelids. It was no more, however, than one glance, for immediately she stooped again

when she saw who it was that lingered, and dashing her fingers along the chords of the instrument, appeared to be making an effort at least to bury her thoughts in its harmony. I stood for a moment, and then, ashamed of myself, and troubled with her troubles and with my own, I followed the rest into the great library which Augustus placed there beneath the protection of the Palatine Apollo. The priestess parted from us at its entrance, after pointing out a low and massive door of bronze on the right-hand, within which, as she told me, the remains of the Sibylline prophecies are preserved, unseen by profane eyes, watched over perpetually by the guardians of the place.

CHAPTER XVI.

BUT so much was I occupied with thinking on the particulars of Athanasia's behaviour, some of which I have just described to you, that, in truth, neither the closed receptacle of those precious relics of the Sibylline prophecies, nor even the opening view of the great Palatine library itself, was able at first to take hold on my attention. I had walked by the side of my young friend, and behind the stoic (who, I think, was expressing, in his pompous fashion, much admiration of the singing of Rubellia), along one or two of the great halls in which the library is contained, before the novelty of the objects surrounding me made any impression even on my eyes; and even after these were in some measure engaged, my mind still continued to dwell with sorrowful interest on the troubled aspect of the maiden, and on the sweet low notes of her uncompleted song. At length, however, the natural levity of youth, and the fervour of curiosity, attained the victory for the moment over my hidden sources of meditation, and I began to be present, not in body merely, in a place where there was so much that might well occupy and interest the mind. The far-

receding rows of yellow marble columns conducted my eyes into the interminable recesses of that wide range of stately chambers, in which the records of the thought and spirit of all past ages are piled up together ; and gazing on the loaded shelves which everywhere ascended into the galleries above, I could not but be affected with many new emotions of wonder, and admiration, and reverence. The marble busts of poets and philosophers, which are ranged in front of the different compartments, seemed to preside, in the calm superiority of long-departed greatness, over the undying memorials of intellect and imagination behind them ; and I perused the glorious names upon their pedestals, with many thoughts both concerning the majesty and the feebleness of man. Here it was the high filleted front of Homer that detained, for the first time, the contemplation of one in whose ears, even from earliest infancy, the melodious sublimity of the Mæonian verse had seized and possessed a resting-place of lofty delight. The large eyes of the divine old man seemed, even in sculpture, to be distinctly and visibly blind, while the dreaming serenity of the pale lips below, and the inexpressible sanctity of the towering forehead, revealed how the intense perception at once of the lovely and the great could compensate a thousand fold to the chosen prince of imagination for all the shut out visions of earthly beauty. There again appeared the large mild visage of Plato, with all the depth of meditative genius slumbering in its noble lineaments—while, close beside, the stern piercing glance of the imperious Stagyrte appeared, even in stone, to challenge rightful sway and domination. The beautiful face of Pindar instinct with the intoxication of rapture—the modest majesty of Sophocles—the sarcastic yet noble pride of Aristophanes—and I know not how many likenesses of how many illustrious compeers, in every walk of intellectual exertion, succeeded each other as we passed along—each in his own sphere, reigning by himself ; yet all connected together by a certain common air of visible greatness, like so many successive princes, or glorious contemporary heroes of the same mighty empire.

From the main range of apartments, in which these

objects were placed, there diverged on either hand many lesser chambers, in which we saw studious persons engaged in perusing the works of the learned, each seated by himself, and having his eyes fixed attentively on the venerable parchment extended before him. Of these, some took no notice of us as we passed, nor even deigned to intimate by the smallest movement their perception that any one had entered upon the place of their retirement; but others there were with whom Xerophrastes exchanged, as he walked, lofty salutation, and one or two that even entered for a moment into conversation with him, both touching the cause of his visit and the nature of their own occupations. With one of these, indeed (he was an ancient Greek of singularly bitter aspect, and with a voice very harsh and unmusical), to such a length did the colloquy extend, that we began to think we should never be able to get our stoic away from him, till, as our fortune would have it, it became necessary for them to have a certain book for the purpose of reference, in order to decide a certain point, and then Xerophrastes began to make inquiries concerning one Parmeno, who, as I gathered, must needs be one of those intrusted with the care of the library.

"Ah! do you speak of Parmeno?" quoth the other. "I am afraid, if we must wait for him, we shall not be able to get that invaluable work either this day or tomorrow; for his young pupil the son of Fabricius is dead, and I suppose he will now change his quarters, and be no longer seen so often about these haunts of the Muses."

"Alas!" interrupted Sextus, "and is it even so? I met Fabricius in the Forum a few days ago, and he told me his son was ill; but little did I imagine my dear companion was so near his end. Is it indeed so? and is young Fabricius dead?"

"Even so," rejoined the other. "Rapid, in this instance, of a surety, have been the shears of Atropos! It is but a few moments ago since Agaso the painter passed this way; and he told me he had just been receiving orders to take the young man's likeness, as well as he could, from the corpse."

"If Agaso be so engaged," replied Xerophrastes, "I am afraid we need not expect to find him to-day in his usual place. Perhaps we had better make inquiry for him at the dwelling of Fabricius."

To this Sextus assented; or rather, being lost in reflection concerning the death of his friend, he suffered himself to be conducted by the rest of us, who followed the guidance of the stoic. Passing, therefore, through one or two more apartments, we issued forth, and drew near to the vestibule of Fabricius's house, who, as they told me, was a noble Roman, having the chief superintendence of the whole library, and an intimate friend of Licinius; one whose domestic calamity could not fail to spread much affliction through a wide circle both of patrician kindred and of personal friends.

And when we came to the vestibule, we found already assembled there not a few of the young man's relations; but Xerophrastes immediately said, "Behold Parmeno, he is the most afflicted of them all; and what wonder that it should be so?"

"It is, indeed, Parmeno," replied Sextus. "Alas! the bier is already set forth; without doubt, the last rites are to be performed this evening."

This Parmeno was a most sorrowful but respectable looking figure, seated close by the bier of the youth, whose education, as it appeared, had been committed to his charge. His head was involved in his cloak, so that only his eyes and nose could be seen, but these of themselves expressed a decorous and philosophical melancholy; and the folds of the cloak fell down over the rest of his figure in great order and dignity. On the pavement beside him was seen lying, half-unfolded, a book inscribed with the name of Heraclitus, which the philosopher appeared to have been reading. Now, when Xerophrastes approached, this mourner only stretched forth his hand towards him, and shook his head, but he did not say any thing, nor once look towards us; and indeed to have done so would have inevitably disturbed the august attitude in which he had placed himself. Xerophrastes, on his part, received the proffered hand, and shaking his head in response, said, "Yes, my Ionian friend, I may still bid thee hail and live;

but I must say farewell to the plant thou wast rearing. I must say farewell to the youthful promise of Fabricius."

On hearing these words, the other philosopher drew his mantle quite over his face, and leaned himself heavily against one of the fluted columns of the vestibule, for he seemed to be much shaken. In the mean time Sextus approached the bier, and contemplated his former companion as he lay there stretched out, and wreathed with melancholy garlands; and his countenance expressed as he did so a very afflicting mixture of sadness and astonishment. Neither, indeed, was it possible even for me, that had never before seen the young man, to behold the miserable spectacle without similar emotions; for his age, as it seemed, could not have been much different from my own, and in all things the pale features of his face were interesting, and their expression not less amiable than solemn.

"Alas!" said Sextus, "the last time I saw him, how differently did he appear! We rode out together with some others to Tiber, and spent all the day there; and as we returned by the moonlight, how joyous and merry was his conversation. Methinks I yet hear him laughing and speaking. We parted at the foot of the Capitoline, and never did I see him again till now."

"Oh fate of man!" quoth Xerophrastes; "how uncertain is life, how certain death! Without doubt, young Fabricius had as little thought of dying as any of your company; and yet, see now, he is arrayed for the last time, and the juvenile gown, which he should so soon have laid aside for the manly, is destined to be consumed along with him, amid the blaze of the funeral pile."

"Alas! indeed," replied Sextus, "I am sure there is not one of all his acquaintances that will not mourn over him."

"A fine lad he was," cries one of the standers by; "a fine lad, and an excellent horseman. The Martian Field did not often behold such a rider in these degenerate days of Rome, and the Roman youth."

But while the rest were still contemplating the bier, Xerophrastes, turning to his brother philosopher, said, "Tell me now, my learned friend, do you still, after this

mournful event, continue to reside with the elder Fabricius? Has that excellent man any more sons to be educated, or will he retain you only for the sake of the library, with which assuredly he will find few so conversant as yourself?"

To which Parmeno replied, "Your question, O Xerophrastes, is a natural one, and shows that clear judgment concerning the affairs of men for which you have always been celebrated. No, my friend, the gray-haired Fabricius no longer requires my residence here; for he is about to retire into one of his villas on the Campanian shore, and to bury for ever his affliction in the privacy of his woods. We are about to part, not without mutual tears; and several patricians have already been applying to him for his influence with me, whom, although unworthy of so much research, they earnestly covet, and wish to engage as the instructor of their young men. I have been sitting here not unseen, beside this my former charge, and each is impatient to solicit me into his service."

"Your reputation I well know is high," replied Xerophrastes, "and deservedly so; more particularly for that fine talent you have for giving metaphysical interpretations of mythology, and for explaining the obscure allegories of ancient poets. But for my own part, Parmeno, I find not so much delight in abstract ideas, nor in the passive contemplation of the universe; but incline rather to study, as heretofore, that part of philosophy which relates to action, and the morality of duty."

"Yes, worthy Xerophrastes," returned he, with a most languid serenity; "and, so far as I understand, you sort well in this with the stirring disposition of your friend Licinius."

To which Xerophrastes made answer, "My patron Licinius is fond of action, and I of the rules of action. He says, it is only in war, or in civil functions of a public nature, that a person can prove himself a man. The rest, he says, is visionary, and comes to nothing, or is a slumber of the mind in sensuality, without thought."

"Does he think, then," quoth Parmeno, with a sarcastic smile, "does Licinius think, then, there is no sensuality in perpetual action, and declamation, and noise? To me,

such things appear almost as trivial as the lazy enjoyments of Epicureans, besides being harsh and disagreeable, and not unfrequently ridiculous. But observe, O Xerophrastes! that I speak these things as it were abstractly, and not by any means in disparagement of Licinius, your excellent patron and friend."

To which the stoic replied, in astonishment, "What is this you have said? Do you assert that action is sensual?"

Then Parmeno, lifting from the pavement the book which he had been reading, or appearing to read, said, "It is even so, most erudite Xerophrastes. Indeed, I have always delighted in the most primitive and remote doctrines handed down from antiquity; and among others, in the riddles of this obscure Ephesian. Following the scope of his philosophy, I am led to believe, that so often as the mind impels, or is impelled by other causes, it begins to lose sight of pure knowledge, and becomes in danger of thinking that every thing is vain, light, and evanescent, except what is perceived by the senses. Heraclitus thinks, that love and hatred govern all things. Now, when the principle of discord prevails, it subjects all things to the dominion of action, and to the gross perceptions of sense. But when that of love is prevalent, it emancipates the struggling chaos of things from the yearning of compulsion, and from the darkness of sensual proximity; for, between things that struggle immediately against each other, light has no room to enter in and shine; and therefore it is, that when love gains the ascendancy, a new arrangement is produced—an arrangement that, if I may so express it, is more serene, transparent, orderly, and divine, and wherein things exist in safety from the danger of mutual destruction."

To which learned speech Xerophrastes, after a preliminary cough, made answer, "My opinion coincides rather with that of Empedocles, the immortal Sicilian. He thinks that discord is the only separating and arranging principle which marks the boundaries between things, and enables them mutually to act and repel, in such a way as to preserve order."

"Nay, nay," interrupted Parmeno, his hands being by

this quite disentangled from his cloak, and his countenance considerably lighted up, "nay, nay, to such doctrine I never shall assent. From Empedocles—even from Xerophrastes, I must differ for ever on this head. The order of which you and the Sicilian speak is the order of darkness only, and of blind force,—a kind of order in which fierceness and cruelty always reign."

But Xerophrastes continued, "And I must confess, that I further concur with Empedocles in thinking, that love is a principle of which the predominance is more fit to turn order into a chaos, than to produce the effects you have described."

"Nay, speak not against love," quoth Parmeno, "speak not against love, nor believe that any respect is due to the dictates of Empedocles, who taught the worst that can be taught by any man—that is to say, the alternation of order and confusion succeeding each other throughout all time. To seek for truth in conceptions like these, is no better than to seek repose in the bosom of *Ætna*."

"In reference to that point," resumed Xerophrastes, "I agree with you in your disapprobation of Empedocles. But when you say, that love is the source of knowledge, you much astomish me; for I have always thought rather that its tendency is to bring confusion upon the mind."

"Once more," said Parmeno, "once more let me beseech you to say nothing against love. You are thinking of the love of particular objects. You speak of Cupid, and not of heavenly Eros, who, so far from enchaining, or tyrannizing over the mind, rather enables it to escape into the tranquil freedom of far-extended contemplation. But what is contemplation without the knowledge of permanent forms, on which the mind may find repose, and so keep itself from being perplexed by the shifting aspects of the many-coloured universe? And therefore it is, O Xerophrastes, that sometimes, laying aside Heraclitus, I study the ancient verses of the poet Xenophanes, who shows, by the nature of abstract forms, that a certain unity pervades all things. Xenophanes mused of old at Colophon, looking through the blue ether of my native Ionia. But why should I speak thus at length? Alas!

what is the occasion of our being here ! I perceive the approach of the poet who was to compose an inscription for the urn of my dear Fabricius. Yonder also is the architect, who comes with a design for the tomb. Oh ! day of wo, that I should sit in judgment concerning the epitaph and tomb of my ingenuous youth !”

“It is indeed true,” replied the solemn Xerophrastes, “that even I, in the repercussions of our talk, had well-nigh forgotten all this sorrowful occasion ; but, perhaps, there is something after all not entirely inexcusable in our giving so much superiority to the affairs of philosophical discussion. Now, however, it is evident that we must suspend our colloquy ; and who, I beseech you, above all things, is he that now draws near to the place of this mournful assembly, holding a horse in his hand. Methinks I have seen that face before.”

“That you have indeed, master,” quoth he that had come up, “that you have ; and no longer ago than yesterday neither, if you will be pleased to give yourself the trouble of recollecting me. My name is Aspar, I am well known in every feedery* in Rome, and they that know me best will give every assurance concerning my superiority to any thing in the semblance of a trick. If my excellent friend the noble centurion Sabinus were here, poor old Aspar would have no reason to complain of the want of a good word.”

“Good morrow to you, Aspar,” said Sextus, for he could not help remembering the attention which the Numidian had manifested at the amphitheatre ; “but what is it that brings you hither just at this moment ? And for what purpose have you brought your horse along with you ? for people of your sort do not in general ride on horseback in the courts of the Palatine.”

“Alas !” quoth Aspar, “and is it you, who seem to have been one of the contemporaries of that peerless youth—is it you that ask such a question as this ? I did not, in truth, imagine that there was any friend of young Fabricius who did not know his affection for little Sora. There is not such another filly within twenty miles of the

* Vivarium.

Capitol; but I brought her hither merely out of regard for the family, some of whom I thought might be very anxious to possess a pretty creature of which the dear boy had been so fond. As for myself, I should never bear to look on her again with pleasure, after knowing the sudden manner of his death. I wish to heaven the filly were fairly lodged in one of the paddocks of the Lord Fabricius himself."

"Lead the animal round into the court," quoth Parmeno, "and I doubt not care will be taken of her. Yonder comes one of the buffoons of the theatre; he, I doubt not, is here to disgrace, if he be permitted, this solemn scene, with ranting quotations from the tragic poets. Alas! alas! I cannot bear all this: there also advance the officiators from the temple of Libitina; they have their cypress boughs ready in their hands. O my learned friend, I cannot sustain these things; let me begone into the mansion."

And when he had said so, the admirer of Heraclitus picked up his favourite scroll, and gathering together the folds of his mantle, moved slowly into the house, and Xerophrates followed him with similar gestures: and Sextus and I also were about to take our departure; and he, having procured from one of the slaves of the house a myrtle garland, had already placed it upon the bier of the young Fabricius, as the last testimonial of his concern; when there drew near two young men, clad in long mantles of black, who also seemed to have been before acquainted with my friend, for, on seeing him, they immediately went up and began to exchange with him many expressions of grief and lamentation. But while they were speaking so together, Rubellia, who had been standing all this while a little apart, sent a boy to inform us that the painter we were in search of had at last made his appearance, and was anxious to proceed with his portrait. I drew Sextus away, therefore, and soon joined the lady and the artist; but as we were moving off thus, one of the bystanding slaves, an old gray-headed man, came up and whispered to us, "These two that you have been speaking with are to me the most disagreeable part of this preparation. You have heard their lamentation,

and seen their sweeping raiment of mourning ; but they are nephews of Fabricius, and I think the chief subject of their reflection is, the probability that one or other of them must be adopted by my bereaved old master. Alas ! alas ! so goes all between Lucina and Libitina. There was never a birth nor a marriage that did not create some sorrow, nor a funeral procession that did not give rise to some joy. Your rhetoricians talk, but what avails it all ? Slaves and masters are all alike subjected to the evils of the world, and of these death is both the last and the least."

Little Agaso, the painter, was an amusing character, and even in his exterior there was so much of the amusing, that I wish I had for a moment fingers like his, that I might give you the pleasure of surveying his portrait. Imagine, however, since that is all you can do, a smart dapper little bandy-legged man of Verona, dressed in a Grecian mantle, and endeavouring in every particular to look as much as possible like a Greek. Had Xerophrates not gone off with his brother of Ionia, I have no doubt this man would have made his presence a sufficient excuse for speaking nothing but Greek to us ; but, even as it was, his conversation was interlarded with an abundant intermixture of the phraseology of that noble tongue. Nothing could be spoken of which Agaso did not think fit to illustrate, either by the narration of something he himself had seen or heard during his residence at Athens, or at least by some quotation from some of the Grecian poets, of whom it seemed to me that Menander and Anacreon were his foremost favourites. To judge from the square and somewhat ponderous formation of the man's features, Nature had not designed him for any of the most mercurial specimens of her workmanship ; but he contrived, notwithstanding, by perpetual shrugging and grimacing, and, above all, by keeping his eyes and eyebrows continually in motion, to give himself an air of no inconsiderable life and vivacity.

Hopping before us with much alacrity, this little artist soon conducted our steps through seven, eight, or ten galleries, opening off each other, until at length, a certain curtain being withdrawn, which had covered the space

between two pilasters, we found ourselves in a spacious and brilliant apartment, which, from the superior courteousness wherewith he bowed us into it, there could be no difficulty in perceiving to be the customary sphere of his own exertions. It was not altogether deserted nor solitary, even when we entered ; but the removal of the intervening curtain soon attracted many more of the loungers of the baths, and ere poor Sextus was fairly fixed in the proper attitude before the table of the painter, the modest youth had the mortification to find himself surrounded with a very crowd of knowing and curious physiognomies. The presence of these, however, if it might have been gladly dispensed with by Sextus, appeared, most assuredly, to be quite the reverse of unwelcome to the master of the room. On the contrary, there arose between the little man, as he was preparing his brushes, and those who had come to survey him at his work, such a learned gabble of mutual compliments, remarks, and disquisitions, that it seemed to me as if he would have been quite disappointed, had he not been favoured with their admiring attendance.

The walls all around being covered with different specimens of Agaso's workmanship, there was no want of subjects for every sort of conversation likely to interest his ears.

"How noble," cries one, "is that large portrait you have just been finishing of Rupilius ! Heavens ! with what felicity you have caught the august air of that dignified man ! Methinks I see him just about to enter the Basilica, when he knows that some great cause is awaiting his decision. What solemnity in his aspect ! what grandeur in the gown ! How finely the purple of the latyclave is made to harmonize with the colouring of the cheeks and chin ! What beautiful handling about the fingers with which he grasps his tablets ! As for the head of the stylus, it is the very eye of the picture."

"Exquisite, indeed," quoth another of these knowing characters ; "but who can look at it, or any thing else, in the same room, with this charming little jewel ? Heavens ! what a beauty ! who can it be ! for I never saw her either at the circus or the amphitheatre, or at any other

place of resort. What an inimitable picture of modesty and loveliness is this girl !”

The little painter heard this last piece of eulogy with an air of some little embarrassment, and at the same time looked very cunningly towards the person who had uttered it. But the Lady Rubellia tossed her head, as if indignantly, and whispered to me, “Pretty she may be, though I can’t say that style of dressing her hair is at all adapted for such features ; but as for modesty, I should like to see what part of her face it is in which that is so visible. I asked Agaso, two or three days ago, who it was, and he told me it is a little Spanish girl, whom that august looking person, with the grand laticlave, and the purple cheeks and chin, and the glittering stylus, thought fit to bring with him from Spain, when he was relieved from the hard duties of the proprætorship,—which, without doubt, her agreeable society had enabled him to go through with better than that of his own wife would have done. I dare say, he takes good care she shall not be seen either at circus or amphitheatre ; and, indeed, I think it is sufficient impudence to show her likeness in this way, in the company of so many portraits of respectability. But there is no saying how far these enamoured old dotards will go. Impudent minx that it is, I think if the wife of this same Rupilius were to hear of its being here, she would do well to come and scratch its eyes out. I have no patience for such audacity.”

“My dear lady,” quoth the painter, who overheard somewhat of what she was saying, “my dear Lady Rubellia, for the sake of all that is sacred, don’t say a word about this to any one again ; wait at least till the canvass for the augurship be over, and then, if you will, you may say any thing about it you please. But just at present Rupilius would be very angry if any of these affairs were made more public than is necessary ; for there are always enough of people to exaggerate and misrepresent.”

“Exaggerate, indeed !” replied the lady ; “there is much room for exaggeration, forsooth. For my part, I think Rupilius ought to be ashamed of himself ; and at his time of life too.” Then sinking her voice into a note

almost inaudible, she added, "I think you said he was just the same age with my own uncle?"

"Yes," says the painter, "I think he must be about the same standing; and I think he went to Spain just about the period of your own marriage."

"Filthy old fellow," quoth she very quickly; "and this is what he has brought home with him! I have a great mind to tell his wife."

"Hush, hush," said Agaso; "if you do so, you will ruin me. Besides, this is the very day Rupilius spoke of bringing her to see his own portrait; and, indeed, I am sure that is the old senator's hem, in the adjoining gallery. They will be here in an instant. I rely on your prudence."

And no sooner had Agaso said so, than of a surety the portly original of the laticlaved portrait walked into the room, having his gown, and every part of his dress, arranged in all things after the same fashion represented in the picture; although in the living countenance it was easy to discover not a few deep lines and spots which had been cautiously omitted in the copy. By his side moved a short pousy woman, arrayed in the extremity of gaudy and costly attire, whose own naturally dark and swarthy complexion did not, in spite of all the arts of cosmeticism, harmonize very well with the bright golden ringlets of her Sicambrian peruke; while behind the pair came a thin damsel, whose scraggy lineaments exhibited a sort of faint shadow, or type, as it were, of the same visage, the rudiments of which had been so abundantly filled up in that of the broad and rubicund old magistrate her father.

"There, now," quoth Rubellia, perceiving their approach; "just see with what effrontery this ancient libertine struts into the room; and his wife and daughter, too, are along with him. Oh, dog-eyed audacity! And yet it is scarcely possible to observe the group without laughing."

But if she, or any of the rest of us, felt any inclination to smile on the very first appearance of the party, I leave you to judge how much this inclination must have been increased by what passed after they had begun to make their observations on the work which they had come to

examine. For the ex-proprætor himself, after saluting Agaso, stood still with an air of infinite dignity, in the midst of the apartment, while the fond daughter, rushing close up to his picture, could with difficulty affix any limits to her expressions of the satisfaction with which it inspired her. The little fat Metulla also (for so his wife was named) devoured its features at first with his eyes of rapture; but she ere long began to see and to say, that, after all, imperfect justice had been rendered to the manly charms of her lord.

"Oh Jupiter!" quoth the young damsel, "if papa were not here himself, I should expect the wood to speak to us, so perfectly does this resemble him! Look at the very ring upon his finger. It is the very ring he wears! One can see the very images that are engraved upon it; one can see the three Graces that papa always seals with. I never saw such a picture—when will it be brought home?"

"Hush, hush, now, Primula, my darling," quoth the mother. "It is certainly an astonishing likeness; but I don't understand what it is that makes painters, nowadays, paint people older than they are. I am sure your papa, girl, does not look near so old as in this picture. It may be like him hereafter; but he should have been represented much younger just now. And besides, it wants something of his expression. Don't you think so now yourself, sir?" (turning to the painter.) "Don't it strike yourself that you have given him too sombre a look? Rupilius has surely been looking very gloomily when he sat to you."

On this the painter, leaving Sextus, advanced to the side of Metulla, and after a pause of some moments, spent in contemplating alternately his own work and the original, said, with a courteous simper, "How much am I indebted to you, most noble lady, for this visit, and these judicious remarks! Without doubt, you must be the best judge. But as for me, I only wish you had accompanied the senator when he was sitting to me, and then, without question, his countenance would have worn the look you desiderate; and I perhaps might have more easily succeeded in catching it, being aided by your suggestions. But ladies do not know how their lords look at times, when

they themselves are not present. I have painted the senator ; but I have missed—I perceive it too plainly—I have missed something of the man. I hope it may yet be amended.”

“How modest he is !” ejaculated the flattered spouse ; “how modest he is, with all his genius ! A single sitting will suffice, I am sure, to give it every thing it wants. We shall come,” added she, in a lower tone, “we shall come some day when you are quite alone, and I will sit by you, and talk to Rupilius all the while ; and that will keep senate-meetings and edicts, and all that stuff, out of his head, and you shall paint him just when he has his own smile on his face.”

“Delightful !” replied the artist ; “how happy shall I be in having such an opportunity of improving both the picture and myself ! We must positively prevail on the senator to give us this one sitting more ; for, consider only, had the picture been for the Senate, or for Cesar, or for the Province, or any public place, it might have been well, perhaps, to leave it almost as it is ; but the case is very different in a domestic portrait. In regard to that, the usual domestic expression should, above all things, be sought for ; and the ideas of intelligent private friends should especially be consulted by the artist.”

“Never ask his consent,” quoth Metulla, smiling upon her lord ; “leave the whole matter to me. I have resolved, and that is enough. The picture is for me, and I am determined to have it done according to my own wishes. And besides, if he were to refuse me, I know how I should be certain to overcome him ; for he has asked me to sit to you myself, and you know if I were to persist in sitting with my gloomy face, as he has with his, he would be so much mortified that we should soon bring him to his right reason.”

“Your gloomy face, noble lady !” replied the artist, strutting back a pace or two. “I am afraid, if that is the charm by which alone he is to be softened, we must give up all our hopes. Which day of the Greek kalends shall I say my Lady Metulla is to sit with her gloomy face ?”

“Ha ! ha ! ha !” quoth Metulla ; “you are such a wag. I protest I believe you will keep me laughing, in spite of

myself, all the time I am sitting. And pray now, what dress do you think I should wear? Prima says, I ought certainly to be in green; but I was thinking that perhaps a yellow byssine would suit me better. But I shall send over half a dozen robes, and then we can choose whichever seems to be the best. One thing only I am quite resolved upon, and that is, that I shall have my golden chain, with the little miniature of the proprætor—the senator, I mean—he is no longer proprætor, you know—at the end of it.”

“Nothing could be better—nothing could be in finer taste,” he made answer; “and if my lady should think of green, or blue, or purple, or any dark colour for the gown, the rings of the golden chain, and the setting of the miniature, would come in so beautifully, they would have the richest effect in the world. O! by all means, let us have the chain and the miniature.”

“And do, my dear mother,” interrupted Prima, “and do have on the sapphire tiara when you sit to Agaso; for, you know, everybody says you look better with it than any other head-dress.”

“We shall consult Agaso and your papa, my dear, and whatever they think fittest shall be the thing.”

“Or what would you think,” continued Prima, “of having your own hair simply, like this lady here?” (It was that of the Spanish girl she meant.) “What a pretty face! Well, if I were to be painted, I should like to be dressed exactly like this.”

“A smart little girl, indeed,” quoth the mother. “I think I should know that face. I am sure I have met with that young lady somewhere—though where or when I have not the least idea. Is she a Roman lady, Agaso?”

“No, not a Roman lady,” answered the artist; “nor do I think my lady can ever have met with her. But perhaps my Lord Rupilius may, for she is a Spaniard.”

Agaso, on saying so, turned with a smile of indescribable cunning to the senator; but he, scarcely appearing to look at the picture, answered with great gravity, “I think I have seen the countenance before; and perhaps it was in my province. The face is certainly a pretty one: but nothing so very extraordinary.”

"No, no," echoed Metulla; "nothing so very extraordinary. The girl might be a beauty in Spain; but I am sure she would be nothing extraordinary in Rome."

"Well, now," said Prima, "I am no judge; but I do think her very handsome, and I am sure she must be noble, although a provincial, for she has not the least vulgarity in her look."

"No, not exactly vulgarity—far from it," quoth Metulla; "but yet how one misses the air of the capital. They may say what they like," added she, drawing herself up; "but there is no such thing as a really urbane air to be got out of Rome."

"Was my lady Metulla ever in Greece?" said the painter, bowing low as he spoke.

"No, indeed," quoth she, with a titter, "no, indeed. Greece may be Greece, but Rome's Rome. Rome's enough for me; I have no curiosity to see Greece, I assure you."

"Good heavens, now!" interrupted the daughter, "I, mamma, am surprised to hear you say so. I should so like to be in Greece. There are so many pretty things to be seen in Greece—they make all the prettiest rings and bracelets in Greece, don't they?"

The question was addressed to Agaso, who, bowing again, but looking a little grave, said, "In Greece, or by those who have been in Greece, certainly. There is nothing to be done in any of the arts without having seen Greece. But it was of the ladies of Greece that we were speaking."

"And what think you of the ladies of Greece?" quoth Metulla, returning to the charge. "I hope you will not say that they are superior to those of Rome? I have a notion they don't pay for what they have so well, however."

"Let it be admitted," answered the smiling Agaso; "how should poor Greece equal imperial Rome in such points as these? But I cannot give up my old friends the Greeks, notwithstanding—and more particularly the Greek ladies. They are beautiful graceful creatures; that every one who has seen them must admit."

"Graceful indeed!" quoth Metulla. "I believe, if the

truth were known, they are no better than they should be."

"And yet I must own," continued the artist, with another bow to Metulla, "that they do want some things which the Roman ladies have. There is a certain dignity, as it were—a certain noble tranquillity, that I never saw anywhere but in Rome."]

To which last speech Metulla vouchsafed no answer; but I saw that it had produced the intended effect; for, while she was hearing it, a soft flutter of satisfaction appeared to pass over her chubby cheeks, and the unsuspecting matron became visibly lost in a maze of complacent meditations on its close. The pause in that conversation allowed me to overhear something of what was passing in another part of the room, where some other picture appeared to be exciting among another set of observers a scarcely inferior measure of curiosity. On going up to them, I perceived that it was a sketch, in chalk only, of the head and shoulders of an old white-bearded man, which was occupying their attention; and when I had gained an opportunity of more nearly surveying it, I recognised without difficulty, and not, as you will believe, without interest, the features of the same Thraso who died on the preceding day at the Flavian Amphitheatre. The greater number of those who were looking on it seemed also to have been present at his death; for I heard pointed out by them with exactness the parts in which the resemblance had been most successfully taken. The beauty of the old man's lineaments, and the serenity of his aspect, they all admired; and while they were loud in praising these, Agaso himself also joined them, saying, "Oh, so you have found out my old Christian. How did you get hold of him? for I meant it not to be seen till I had lain on a little of the colour. But is it not a fine study? is it not a noble head? I think I shall introduce it in the picture I am painting for Pliny. The subject is the sacrifice of Iphigenia—don't you think it would do gloriously for the head of one of the priests?"

"A priest!" quoth one of the loungers; "I was afraid you were going to make it serve for the head of the victim. It is only taking away the beard, and paint-

ing the hair black, and a few more trivial changes such as that ; and poets and painters can do far more wonderful things than turning age into youth. Your ugly old infidel might really make a very fine Iphigenia."

"Ha ! ha ! Curio," replied the artist, "you must always have your joke, Curio ; but seriously, do you not admire the old head ? I went to the amphitheatre rather late, without expecting any thing particular ; but, you know, a painter never goes anywhere without his tablets, and when I saw the man come in, it immediately struck me that he might be turned to some account. I made several little sketches of him, for it was a long time ere it was over ; and this is from the one I took just after he had made his oration to Trajan. His hands and feet were singularly fine, I thought. Here," said he, turning over the leaves of his tablets, "here you have him in a variety of shapes ! here, this now is the knee—the muscles showed powerfully when he knelt on one knee ; there again you have his fingers as they were folded on his breast—not much flesh, but the line very good, and the veins well expressed. I think one of the priests might stand in that attitude very properly, just at the moment when Agamemnon is supposed to be about to utter the final word."

"Well," replied another, "for my part, I think the resignation of the Christian must have been rather a different sort of thing from that of Agamemnon's priests."

"Priest indeed !" interrupted Metulla, who by this time had been able to bear herself away from her ex-proprætor's likeness ; "do you talk of making a priest out of a Christian ? I wonder you are not afraid of such a blasphemous thought. For me, if I had a picture of an atheist in my house, I should expect the roof to fall in. And yet here, where you have temples on every side of you, and the whole Capitoline within view, you speak of turning this old infidel into one of Agamemnon's priests ! Jupiter and Apollo preserve us ! to make a priest out of a Christian !"

"Poh, poh !" quoth the critic who had been speaking before ; "these wicked artists have no thought about such things as these. I think we may consider ourselves as

very lucky in not having heard him proposing to turn the old fellow into a god. I have heard of such things. But I believe I should say nothing about that, for I once sat for a god myself; and although I am not quite so bad as a Christian, I really think I was unworthy of such an honour."

"You are very modest, indeed, sir," replied the lady, with a countenance of some little indignation; "and if one may take the liberty to ask such a question, what god was it that had the honour to have you set for his likeness?"

"Why—Janus—I think it was Janus," answered Curio; "yes, and now I remember me, Agaso here had the impudence to paint his own likeness for the other face of the deity. I believe the representation was pretty generally admired."

"Yes, by two at least in the city," replied the little fat lady, very tartly.

"You are forgetting the young ladies," returned the placid Curio. "So many of them fell in love with it, that Agaso and I were weary of it. There was no peace till the picture of Janus was shut up—ha! ha!"

"I really don't approve of this conversation," quoth Metulla, "and I hope few that are here approve of it any more than myself. Come, come, Prima, my love, it is high time to be going. This is no place for us, when such talk is permitted."

So saying, this pious female walked away, escorted by her husband and her daughter. She and Prima kissed their hands, as if to bid good-by to the picture of the old senator, as they passed it, and the whole party were soon at such a distance that Curio and some of the company thought it safe to indulge in a laugh at their expense. But of all the laughers, there was not one that laughed more heartily than Rubellia herself.

"Cunning old rogue!" quoth she; "I was much inclined to betray him once or twice; but, in spite of myself, I can scarcely help taking part with him, now that I have seen this creature, whom he has the misery to call wife. Who, in the name of Hermes—who is she? and

how does a man of his rank happen to have burdened himself with such a bundle of disgrace?"

"Good Jove!" says Curio, "is it possible that there is any one ignorant of the history of Rupilius, and his celebrated marriage? I thought the whole story had been as public as the Pantheon."

"I have heard his name," replied she, "and that oftentimes; but I never was told any thing in particular either about him or his history."

"Why, after all," was Curio's answer, "there is nothing so very particular, I believe, either to be told or to be heard. The father of this Rupilius was a considerable favourite about the court of Claudius; and if Narcissus had lived, might have risen to the first honours of the state; but he fell gradually into neglect after the death of that great freedman, and I believe was at last forbid to come to the Palatine by Nero; though I know not whether, as was the case with Vespasian, that punishment was inflicted on him for not sufficiently applauding the singing emperor's voice. However, the man was humbled in his spirit, and having squandered away the best part of his patrimony during the days of his dancing attendance on Narcissus, he was fain to make up his purse again by sending his son down to the dock-yards; and the young Rupilius married, in short, this Metulla, the charming daughter and sole heiress of a certain ancient Ligurian, whose person was well known in the markets, and his name familiar to all frequenters of courts of justice. In the course of the many strange revolutions that have taken place, it is no great wonder that the husband of Metulla should have been sent as *proprætor* into Spain; neither, being sent thither, is it very wonderful that he should have left Metulla behind him. In short, I see nothing wonderful about the matter. Such things happen in Rome every day, and nobody stares at them. I was just thinking of taking a walk by the river-side some day soon, and seeing whether it may not be possible to pick up some other little Metulla for myself."

But about this time the great bell rung in the tower above the baths, and Curio and the greater part of the young loungers that were about Agaso soon dispersed

themselves; some to fence or wrestle—others to play in the tennis-court—others to ride in the Hippodrome, in preparation for the taking of the bath; insomuch that the painter, being left alone with Sextus, Rubellia, and myself, had at length leisure to proceed more diligently with his portrait of the youth. Much did the lady and the painter discourse, and many merry things were said by them both; but all they said could not entirely remove the embarrassment fixed on the countenance of Sextus; nor, of a truth, did he in any sort present himself with much advantage before the eyes of the artist. Rubellia, nevertheless, sat over-against him, with looks of no severe criticism; and I think gazed on him at least as attentively as the painter.

I doubt not she would have remained to the end of the sitting, had not one of her household come with a message to her, which, as it seemed, rendered necessary her departure. It struck me that the messenger answered very well to Dromo's description of the fat Calabrian with whom he and Boto had been drinking; but of this I said nothing to Sextus.

It was very near the hour of supper before we were dismissed, and we found Licinius already about to enter the eating-chamber when we reached home.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE orator received us both with less coldness than I could have expected, after the conversation he had held with me in the morning; but I suppose it was his knowledge that the intervening hours had been spent in Rubellia's company, at the Augustan Library,* which had, in some measure, softened his feelings of jealousy

* The original library had been destroyed in the conflagration of Nero; and the establishment suffered again in the time of Domitian. But it had been diligently restored, as far as possible, by Nerva and Trajan.

towards his son ; and perhaps he had given me credit for advice and interference, to the merit of which I had, in fact, no claim. Howbeit, it was easy to see that his mind was still far from being perfectly at rest, and that, in spite of the effort he made to occupy himself and his company with indifferent topics of conversation, he could never entirely disengage his own thoughts from those domestic concerns which had produced an impression so serious on spirits naturally, as you have heard, above all others buoyant and elastic.

But he remained not long at table after supper was concluded, being summoned to discourse in private with a client, who had that day arrived in Rome from some remote district of Italy ; so that Sextus and I were left at leisure to spend the remainder of the evening as it might please ourselves ; for, as to Xerophrastes, he had not as yet made his appearance, and we took it for granted he had remained at the sorrowful mansion of Fabricius, for the purpose of consoling, with philosophical discourses, his bereaved brother of Ionia. We retired, therefore, into the apartment of my young friend, where, if either books, or musical instruments, or wooden swords for fencing, had been gifted with any power of amusement, we could have had no reason to complain of tedium. But although each of these methods was resorted to in turn, they were all very much in vain.

“ Poor Sextus could not read a page in any of his favourite poets, without coming upon some verse which made him throw down the scroll to ruminate on the charms of his Sempronia. When he took up his lute, his fingers seemed spontaneously to evoke only the most melancholy of sounds ; and ere long, those trembling fingers were sure to wander from the melody, while tears were gathered in his eyes, or coursed each other, slow and large, down his guileless cheeks. It was only in the more violent exercise of the foil that he succeeded in banishing from his thoughts the troubles of his situation ; but both of us, having contended till we were breathless, were soon compelled to sit down, and then the unhappy boy’s exhausted body seemed to communicate a new infusion of debility to his harassed mind. When I looked on him

sitting in the corner, the tears dropping ever and anon on his folded hands, and the purple glow of the sitting sun gleaming on the disordered ringlets of his glossy hair, I could not help feeling all my soul dissolved with pity within me; and if I did not entirely forget my own situation in the contemplation of his, I am sure my sympathy was not the less sincere, because I had both love and perplexities of my own.

We sat over-against each other for the most part in silence (for I soon found that I could not say any thing capable of effectually interesting him), until the shades of evening had quite darkened the chamber, and then we walked together, not less silently, in the adjoining open gallery, until the moon had arisen from above the tall poplars around the Pantheon and Baths of Agrippa, and diffused her radiance over all the beautiful gardens and noble edifices that lay beneath us, down to the brink of the river. Lassitude of spirit then, if not in expectation of sleep, rendered Sextus desirous of retiring to his couch; so, having exhorted the youth to wrestle with his grief, and to call hope to his aid, I at length left him to himself. But as for me, I had as yet no feeling of weariness, and, besides, I remembered the promise I had made to Dromo in the morning; I therefore had my lamp lighted, and set myself to read in my chamber, hoping thereby at least to sooth my mind, and so prepare myself better either for quiet slumber, or for taking a part in any thing that might tend to the benefit of my friend.

I was very much surprised, indeed, that the Cretan had not as yet come to me, and made inquiry concerning him of Boto; but hearing from him that the man was absent from the house, and that no one knew what had become of him, I thought from this there was the more likelihood of his being engaged in some scheme, the result of which I should by-and-by learn from his own lips.

I dismissed my Briton, therefore, and, as I have said, prepared me to read by my watchlight, and while I was considering what I should read, I remembered the scroll I had received from Thraso, which forthwith I took from the place in which I had locked it up on the morning of

the preceding day. There fell from out of it, as I unfolded it, a letter sealed, but without any superscription. This I of course considered as meant only for the eye of Athanasia ; so I kissed the parchment her fingers were destined to touch, and before I began to read, restored it to the receptacle from which it had been taken.

Now some of you, my young friends, that now listen to me, have already heard me speak, on another occasion, of the impression which that night's reading made upon my mind, and been told, from my own lips, what book it was that was contained in the scroll of Thraso ; the rest of you will judge for yourselves with what astonishment it was that I, who had at the best expected to unfold some obscure treatise of Asiatic lore, some semi-barbarous exposition of mystical riddles, found myself engaged in the perusal of a plain and perspicuous narrative of facts, written evidently by a man of accomplishment and learning, and in Greek, of which the most elegant penman of these times could have had no occasion to be ashamed. In a word, it was the Gospel of the holy physician St. Luke, which had been put into my hands ; and at this day I am still grateful that this was the first of the Christian books which I had an opportunity of seeing ; for such had been my education, that I am afraid others, not less worthy of the true faith, might have repelled me by the peculiarities of their composition, as well as by the acquaintance with many things, to me then entirely unknown, which they take for granted in the style of their commencement. Here, however, there was enough only of mystery the more effectually to stimulate my curiosity, while the eagerness with which I engaged myself in its gratification was abundantly repaid from the beginning, both by the beauty of the simple narrative itself, and the sublimity of the conceptions imbodyed and evolved in its course.

Considering the book which I was reading as one merely of human origin and invention, I could not help regarding it with such admiration, that it appeared to me above all things wonderful I had never seen it mentioned by any of the writers of the age, or heard it spoken of by any of those who, in my presence since I came to

Rome, had talked concerning the faith and doctrines of the persecuted Christians. But this was not all—at least, said I to myself, there is something here which deserves to be inquired into and examined. Of things such as these, if told falsely, it must needs have been—nay, it must still be easy to prove the falsehood. It is impossible that, in the days of Tiberius, any such events should have occurred in Palestine, without being more or less submitted to the inspection of Roman eyes. This is no wild tale, handed down from the dark ages of a barbarous race. Here I have a Roman centurion,* described as being among the witnesses of this man's miraculous power, and as acknowledging his belief in the divinity of his benevolence. Here, at least, must have been one spectator without prejudices, otherwise than against the potency of this Prophet of Nazareth. Of a surety the legends of Rome herself contain many tales which demand a much greater measure of indulgence; since the wonders they narrate appear to have been oftentimes attended with no beneficial consequences, either to individuals or to the state; whereas here the occasion appears always to have been such as might justify the interference of supernatural might. The power of this person seems to have been exerted only for good; and his precepts are full of such godlike loftiness as neither Socrates, nor Plato, nor any of those Greek sages who bowed in reverence to the hoary wisdom of Egypt and India, would have disdained to admire.

Such, I think, were some of the thoughts that followed each other in my mind, while I was reading the first part of this Sacred Volume. The doubts, suspicions, and distrusts with which they were mingled—the under current of reluctance with which I felt myself all along contending—were such as you may more easily imagine than I can describe.

As the narrative went on, however, you will have no difficulty in supposing that my attention became more and more closely riveted, and that, occupied with the

* St. Luke, chap. vii. ver. 1.

strange events and sublime scenes it unfolds—and agitated by turns with the pity, the wonder, the terror, and the admiration that matchless story must ever awaken, either in believing or hesitating minds—I had forgotten, for the time, every thing beyond the page of the volume on which my finger was fixed. I had read so till the oil of my lamp was wellnigh exhausted, and my eyes already began to feel strained, by reason of the feebleness and uncertainty of its light. Nevertheless, so thoroughly was I still occupied, that the door of my chamber was opened without my perceiving it. It was only the rustling of Dromo's cloak against the edge of my chair that made me aware my privacy was disturbed; and I turned round to the Cretan with a start as sudden as that of one roused by a rude hand from the strong slumber of midnight.

The face of the man was greatly flushed, and he seemed to be much out of breath; but in spite of these symptoms of recent fatigue, I soon perceived that he had not come thither with any thought or purpose of repose.

On the contrary, his hands seemed to be busied in tightening his girdle, even before he was able to speak, and the first words he uttered were, "Come along—come along, sir—this is no time for study. We must be quick, indeed, if we mean to do any service to-night. I have acquaintance with some of the soldiers at the Capene Gate, and they will let us pass through; but they are relieved at the next watch, and then we shall have no chance."

"And why," said I, hastily thrusting the scroll into my bosom, "why, Dromo, or for what purpose, should we desire to pass through the Capene Gate at the dead hour of night?"

"Come along," said he; "in brief, there is no time for explanation. It is simply because it is the dead hour of night that we must pass through the gate; for it would do nobody any good to pass through at any other time. Heaven knows, and so do my weary limbs, that I have been through it more than once already since the moon rose; but this is no occasion either for explanation or complaint. Come along, in a word, for the sake of all that is holy—or abandon Sextus to his fate."

Thus adjured, I could not oppose any obstacle to the zeal of this active Cretan. So, wrapping myself from head to foot in my mantle, I glided down the staircase behind him, and stole, with quick but cautious steps, through the hall. The chained porter was lying asleep on a bundle of skins across the threshold ; but Dromo had already found means to have the door opened, so he leaped lightly over the man, and I imitated his agility.

The Cretan then locked the gate on the outside, by means of a key which he carried in his bosom, and in a twinkling began to move onward at a pace not much inferior, I think, to that of a well-trotting pony. The refreshing current of the stirred air excited me as much as the infection of his eagerness ; so I also moved rapidly, and without asking any further question ; satisfied, in short, to follow, like a well-trained soldier, the guidance of the leader to whose command I had submitted myself.

Nor could I easily have found a better. But instead of conducting me, as I expected, along some of the wide and stately windings of the great streets I had already traversed, this cunning varlet (who seemed, indeed, to move as if he had a natural aversion to every open place) threaded one obscure lane after another, keeping always, where the moonlight had any access, to the dark side of the way ; insomuch that a person better skilled than myself might well have been somewhat puzzled ; and as for me, I had not the least conception whither I was going. Close, however, did I adhere to him ; and, in truth, it was no wonder if I suffered less than he did from the race ; for Dromo was both much older and, though but a little fellow, much heavier than me, and besides, according to his own account of the matter, this was not the first race he had encountered that night. Howbeit, we both continued to go on, without much slackening the pace at which we had commenced, and reached the Capene Port, which, as you know, is on the south side of the city, not many bow-shots from the Anio, before I could have imagined it possible to traverse so great a space. I comprehended well enough, from certain gestures exhibited at crossings and turnings, that the obscure path of the Cretan had been partly selected for the purpose of avoiding any interviews with the watchers of the night ; but I

have no doubt its shortness also had, on the whole, recommended it. At least, I am sure I must have taken double the time to perform the journey, had I either followed the line of the Sacred Way, or gone by the river-side, on the west of the Aventine.

Before coming close up to the gate, Dromo told me to wait for him a single moment, and stepped down into a low cellar, in which a light was burning; but he staid not long there, and when he returned to me, I observed that his style of walking was a good deal more clumsy than usual, which, indeed, was not much to be wondered at, considering that he had now to carry, not only himself, but two huge skins of wine, intended, as I at once suspected, for the purpose of facilitating our passage through the gate of the city at that very questionable hour. I told him my suspicion in a whisper; but he made no answer, except by handing to me one of his burdens, which I should have thought it very unfair to refuse. So laden, therefore, we crept on as well as we could to the portal, beneath the shadow of which two lusty and well-sinewed Prætorians were pacing to and fro very majestically, their armour as they moved ringing audibly upon them amid the silence of the night.

Of that silence, however, my Cretan seemed to have much more reverence than could be expected from shields or cuirasses. Slowly did he make his approach to one of those moving statues, and with gestures of respect did he place his jolly burden at his feet. The Prætorian halted in silence, on observing this method of salutation. In silence did he stoop and lift it, and with as little noise as possible did he apply his lips to take cognizance of its contents. The result of that cautious inquiry was, as it appeared, not unsatisfactory; yet the other skin, which I, imitating in all things the gestures of Dromo, had placed at the foot of the companion guard, was subjected to a scrutiny equally exact, before the postern was opened to us. Silently did the well-oiled key and bolt and hinges turn, and very silently stooping did we step beneath the lintel of the Capene Gate, which as silently was again made fast as soon as we had fairly got through it. Immediately on passing, however, we must needs stop for a little moment to draw our breath; and it was then that,

hearing distinctly through wood and iron these two respectable warriors smacking their lips at the close of every draught, poor Dromo could not refrain from expressing his regret that, having been so generous to them, he had left nothing at all to himself. But I soon relieved him from this unpleasant train of reflection, by giving him a few pieces of coin, and desiring him, if he knew of any place of equal convenience on that side the gate, to bring forth with a small cupful for ourselves, that we might enter with the better spirit on whatever should yet remain before us of our journey. A very plentiful cup, you may believe, was very speedily produced, and almost as speedily exhausted; after which we resumed our progress, though at a rate much more moderate.

An dwalking thus more leisurely, the Cretan did not now refuse to answer the questions I had put to him before with so little success. On the contrary, whether it was that the wine I had given him opened his heart, or that he had some private objections to moving in silence between the lofty towers and other funereal monuments that, after you have passed the stream of the Anio, throw their gloomy shadows across all that part of the Appian Way—(for, as to this point, I am not, indeed, prepared to speak with any certainty)—the man was now apparently quite as much disposed to be communicative as hitherto he had been otherwise.

“A busy day indeed,” quoth he, “and a bustling one has this been with me; and yet I think the worst is still to come of it.”

“And where,” said I, “have you been all day, my good Dromo? for, indeed, both Sextus and I were wondering what could have become of you.”

“Become of *me*!” he replied; “and I assure you, I, on my side, have been wondering more than once what would have become of *him*, had he not happened to have my assistance in this affair, which, between ourselves, is one of the most delicate I was ever any way engaged in. Well, had I been working as hard for the lady Rubellia as I have been against her—and had I succeeded on that side of the affair, as I yet have good hope I shall on this—I say nothing, but I don’t think, from all I can hear of the widow, I should have had to complain of the want of

some very handsome recompense. But that is not what I am thinking about. I am for Sextus, and all I do is for the sake of Sextus—I should scorn to lend my aid to a lady to assist her in getting a husband who does not like her. I say, I should scorn to do such a thing as that, although I were to have one of Rubellia's own diamond bracelets for my pains."

"Dear Dromo," I made answer, "I have not the smallest doubt of your fidelity, nor yet of your disinterestedness; but I trust, if every thing goes well, you will find all your exertions shall not have been in vain, even as regarding your own interest. If things turn out as we could wish with Sextus, do not entertain the smallest doubt he will take care to reward you to the utmost of your expectation."

"My expectation!" quoth he; "I promise you that is no great affair. Be so good as to look over the wall there, for I, for my part, have looked already, and tell me what you see."

"I see," said I, leaning over the parapet, "I see nothing but a dog gnawing a bone by the side of a bush here."

"Well," replied Dromo; "and is not that robbing the bush? Is not that a very wicked robbery?"

"Robbing the bush, Dromo! what is your meaning?" said I.

"Why, don't you perceive," was his answer, "that if that poor slave's carcass had been allowed to lie where his master left it, it would have fattened the bush? and don't you think it a very brutal robbery of which the vultures and the dogs have been guilty, in robbing the poor bush of what that kind and grateful master intended for it? There is no law in Rome, if such things go unpunished."

So saying, he lifted a large stone from the way, and leaning over the wall beside me, he smote the ravenous animal fiercely upon the loins, as it was stooping there, gnarling and gnawing. The dog on this set up a piteous noise, and ran away yelping among the long grass. But Dromo laughed when he perceived that his aim had been successful, and pursued the creature with an angry hiss;

saying, "Take that, you base cur, and I only wish it had been given to him whose cruel conduct allowed you to taste such a banquet;" then turning to me with a more quiet voice, he proceeded, "They say, in the old time the Esquiline itself used to be full of such horrible sights as these; but it was given to some great man by one of the Cesars,* and now there is not such a pretty place, no, not about all the city. But when the dogs and the vultures were driven from the Esquiline, they came to this quarter, where the wretches they feed on have, at least, the consolation of being devoured in the neighbourhood of many a noble funeral pile. But I tell you," added he, in a lower note, "I tell you, Master Valerius, I fancy some other sorts of animals were obliged to leave the Esquiline about that time, of whom I am more afraid than I am either of beasts or of birds—behold, sir, we must turn off here; a little to the left is the place we must go to."

"I follow you," said I, "good Dromo, like a most exemplary spaniel—you leave me never an inch behind you."

"Come," said he again, "let us move cheerily along. Here, look ye, is the cemetery of a truly noble Roman; for I saw the embers of a recent fire over-against its entrance a few hours ago, and they told me he had been burning one of his poor people, and I saw the little urn in which the ashes were to be placed. Well, if you great men knew the truth of the matter, a master never seems so respectable—I mean to say, his sarcophagus never does—as when the walls around him are filled with comfortable little niches, and every little niche contains the ashes of one or more of the faithful servants of the family. A nobleman's urn never looks like itself when it stands gaping in the midst of an empty mausoleum."

I could scarcely help smiling at the particular zeal with which Dromo appeared to have studied this subject in all its bearings; but neither, I must freely confess it, could I avoid sympathizing, in some measure, with most of the feelings he expressed. I rated him, however, very roundly, for entertaining any suspicions of the kindness of young Sextus, and compelled him to acknowledge besides that

* Augustus gave the Esquiline to Mæcenas, that the poor might cease to make use of it in their funeral rites. He then covered it with those famous gardens to which Horace frequently alludes.

no person in Rome took better care of his slaves, living and dead, than Licinius. But all this availed me nothing, for Dromo had many strange whims in his head ; and I found it was quite in vain to introduce any subject in that region of tombs, other than that of the unworthy treatment to which defunct bondsmen are too often exposed by their masters. I extracted from him, however, a fact of which I had no previous conception ; namely, that the corpses, not of slaves only, but of poor freedmen, are frequently left in that proud and heartless region, to whiten the polluted ground with as many of their bones as the fierce dogs that prowl about the skirts of the imperial city, and foul birds, lured from the mountains by the scent of corruption, may choose to spare.

At length, however, Dromo became quite silent, and walked—not before but beside me—through a bleaker part of the field. As we advanced, he stood still every now and then for a moment, as if to listen ; but whatever he might have heard, or expected to hear, I perceived nothing, except here and there the howl of a dog, or the lazy hooting of the night-owl, from the top of some of the old cypresses that rose between us and the moon. The scene, however, to confess the truth, was sufficiently dreary without any more accompaniments than these. For though the moon was high in heaven, there was much wind in the air ; and a thousand gray clouds, that seemed to be travelling at full speed between the Alps and the Apennine, followed each other over the face of the bright planet, and dimmed ever and anon the lustre of its beauty. And the wind whistled when the moon was obscured, and sighed very piteously ; and then when the cloud passed away, and the clear moon shone out again, there was such a screeching among the owls, that I could not help thinking the moon was glad to hurry away into the bosom of the gray drifting clouds—so abominable was the salutation of those obscene fowls of the night.

At last Dromo seemed to catch the sound he had been expecting ; for he started suddenly, and then laying his finger on his lip, moved forward with long cautious steps to the parapet along which we were walking.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I **CREPT** down to the low wall at his bidding, and, looking over it, perceived that the ground sunk very deeply on the other side; but just at that moment the moon passed behind a thick veil of clouds, so that I could not distinctly see any thing below. It seemed, however, as if the eyes of the Cretan were better than mine, for as he knelt by my side, he seized my wrist with an eager and tremulous gripe, and continued to gaze downward into the hollow, with an earnestness the cause of which I could by no means understand.

At length the cloud rolled away, and the moonbeams, falling brightly on the surface beneath, discovered to my view what it was that had so effectually riveted the eyes of the slave.

The ground there was more desolate of aspect than any part of that which we had traversed—stony and hard, with here and there tufts of withered fern, and a few straggling bushes of thorn, growing out of the ungenial soil. And immediately below the wall over which we were leaning two human figures were visible,—wild uncouth figures, even more desolate than the place in which they appeared. The one of them was sitting on the ground, wrapped in a dark cloak, which entirely concealed the countenance, and even the sex, of the wearer. The other was a half-naked boy, holding in a string a little new-shorn lamb, which with one of his hands he continually stroked and caressed; but his eyes seemed to be fixed steadfastly upon the sitting figure, as if waiting for some signal or command.

Nor was it long before that sitting figure arose, and throwing away the cloak, displayed the gray tangled tresses of an old woman, and two strong bony arms, one of which was stretched forth with an impatient gesture towards the stripling, while the other was pointed upward to the visible moon.

“Strike,” said she, “silly boy—now strike, and strike deeply, and beware lest any of the blood tinge your feet or your hands!”

Low and dismal was the note in which these words

were uttered ; but I heard them as distinctly as if they had been thundered, and I recognised at once the voice of the same old woman who had attracted my notice in the morning, at the foot of the Palatine.

The boy, hearing the words of Pona, drew forth instantly a knife from his bosom, whose glittering blade was forthwith buried at one blow in the throat of the yearling, and it was then first that I perceived a small ditch dug between the boy and the woman, into which, the lamb's throat being held over it, the blood of the innocent creature was made to drop from the fatal wound it had received. So surely had the blow been given that not one faint bleat escaped from the slaughtered animal, and so deeply that the blood flowed in a strong stream, dashing audibly upon the bottom of the receiving trench. And while it was yet dropping so, the old woman, muttering to herself a sort of chant, of which I could understand nothing, showered from her girdle or lap into the trench I know not what of bones, or short sticks, mingled with leaves and roots, which afterward she seemed to be stirring about in the blood, with one of the tall strong stems of the fern that grew there ; and then flinging the bloody fern-stem itself into the ditch, she raised her chant higher, and I heard words such as these, wild and broken, like the note in which they were sung—

“ Bleeds not here in place forlorn,
The spotless yearling newly shorn ?
Lies not here within the trench,
Moistened with the yearling's gore,
Brittle bone
Of hoary crone,
With the strong bone of lusty wench,
Crumbling, crumbling ever more ?
Queen of Heaven, from out thy cloud,
Look while the owl is hooting loud,
That wandering ghost and shivering sprite,
May fear to mock my charm to-night.

Now the bird that sings for thee
Sings from the topmost cypress-tree ;
Drearly now the screech-owl hoots,
Well she knows that we have torn
The blessed hemlock by the roots.
Hark her cry ;
The dark leaves lie
In the blood of the new-shorn.—

Bone, and root, and yearling's blood
Curdle round the wounded sod.—
Look, Hecate, while the night-bird screams,
Wake for us the world of dreams."

And whether it were from the hideous croaking of the voice in which these strange words were sung, or from the squalidness of the scene and the persons before me, or from some infection of the terror with which Dromo was sensibly inspired by what he saw and heard, this indeed I know not; but it is certain that I did not hear out this haggard creature's chant without some feelings, I shall not say of fear, yet, without question, of a very unpleasing nature. The wildness of the gestures of the old woman was such, that I could not doubt she had herself some faith in the efficacy of the foul and cruel charms to which she had resorted; nor could I see her stirring that trench of innocent blood without remembering, with an instinctive horror, the still more ruthless charms, whose practice the poets of Italy have ascribed to such hoary enchantresses. The dreariness of the midnight wind, too, as it whistled along the bare and steril soil around us, and the perpetual variations in the light, by reason of the careering of those innumerable clouds, and the remembrance of the funereal purposes for which, as it seemed, all this region was set apart—the whole of this together produced, I know not how, a certain pressure upon my spirits, and I confess to you I felt, as I was kneeling there by the side of the Cretan, as if I owed him no great thanks for having brought me that night beyond the Capene Gate. Here, however, I was, and there was no escaping without seeing the thing out. I therefore nerved myself as well as I could, and, returning the pressure of Dromo's hand, continued to keep my eye fixed upon the mysterious group below me.

"It seemed as if the goddess to whom the witch's song had been addressed did not listen to it with any very favourable ears; for the outward sign at least, for which it had petitioned, was so far from being granted, that in the conclusion of the chant, the clouds gathered themselves over the face of the planet more thickly than ever, while, instead of any atoning gifts of revelation, the wind howled only more loudly than before among the tombs and the grass,

and the half-scared owl sent up a feeble and more uncertain hooting from her melancholy roost. In spite of all this, notwithstanding, the old woman continued, so far as we could see, in the same attitude of expectation with which she had concluded her song, and the poor stripling her attendant still held the wellnigh drained throat of his murdered lamb above the abominable trench. By degrees, however, the patience of both seemed to be exhausted ; for there arose between them an angry altercation, which showed that each was willing to throw upon the other the failure of the common incantation.

"Infernal brat of Hades !" quoth the witch, "look ye, if you have not stained your filthy hands, and if the thirsty shadows be not incensed, because you have deprived them of some of the sweet blood which they love !"

"Curse not me, mother," replied the boy—"but curse yourself, if you will ; for anybody might have known that the beautiful moon would rather never shine any more than shine upon such a wicked woman as you. Did you think, in truth, that the blood of a stolen lamb would ever propitiate Hecate ? I am but a boy, and yet I told you better."

"Imp of Alecto !" quoth she ; "execrable spawn of all the Furies ! Hold thy peace, foul thing, or I will try whether no other blood may make the charm work better !"

"Beware, beware !" quoth the boy, leaping backwards—"beware what you do ! Remember, I am no longer so weak that I must bear all your blows."

And, as he said so, there was just a gleam of light enough to show me that he brandished above his head the bloody knife with which he had slaughtered the victim at the witch's bidding.

"A curse now upon thee !" continued the witch, stamping her foot furiously, without, however, over-stepping the trench that separated them—"a foul curse upon thee ! and a foul curse, since I am bid to say so, upon the womb that bare thee ! And I would curse the loins that begat thee also ; but that were needless, for the sea is deep, and the strong hounds of Father Ocean will keep what they have fanged."

"Ha, ha ! mad mother," quoth the boy (and I know

not whether I ever heard any sound so hideous as that laugh of his), "say you so, mad mother of mine? and so also will the strong hounds of old Mother Earth."

And at that moment the moon shone out again once more from among the lurid clouds, and I saw that two of those lean dogs, such as I had observed before in that region, had come close up to the woman, and were already beginning to lap the blood from out of the trench before her eyes. And then it seemed as if all the wrath she had before manifested were but as nothing; for instead of doing any thing to scare them from their feast, she sat down beside them, and wrapping her long cloak once more around her, began to curse in her madness the very power to which her prayers had been addressed; and the low steady tone in which she now poured forth her imprecations appeared to me a thousand times more fearful than the previous loudness of her angry screaming.

"Ay," said she, "look forth now from thy cloud,—look forth now, beautiful moon, and listen, if thou hast hearing as well as light, to the foul tongues that are lapping the blood of thy sacrifice! So be it with all the blood that is ever henceforth shed for thee! So fare it with all that ever put trust in thee, false, accursed Hecate; for though thou ridest high in the blue heaven, yet hell is thy birth-place, and hell holds no demon falsier than thee, beautiful, accursed, execrable Moon! A curse upon thy false, smiling face! May the steam of the hot blood they are drinking arise up and blot thee out for ever from the face of the sky! Set quickly in darkness, false, harlot Moon, and console thee in Tartarus with the ghost of thine Endymion!"

And she also concluded her cursing with laughter as full of scorn and rage as that of her boy had been of savage triumph and delight. And then she arose again from the ground, and stooping over the trench, began to caress with her hands the lean dogs that had by this time wellnigh lapped up all the blood.

"Ha, ha! pretty pets of mine," quoth she, in a fondling tone, "would it not have been very hard to deprive you of your feast! Bones enow, I warrant me, have ye picked already, since the Sun, whose light ye hate, went down, and the Moon, that is so dear to us all, began

to shine among the tombs of these proud Romans ; and why should ye not have wine, and the strongest and richest of wine too, to wash down your banquet withal ? Drink on, pretty creatures, and quaff deeply, and then ye shall have sweet slumbers in some lordly cemetery, which it were foul shame to leave for the habitation of the dead alone. Sweet slumbers shall ye have, in spite of all the haughty Manes that may shudder at your presence ; and ye shall rub your crimsoned chops upon the finest urn of them all, and the brightest of their eternal lamps shall keep watch over your heavy slumbers. Drink on, sweet lips, and drink deeply ; and leave not a single drop behind you ; and be sure you salute yon high-sailing, chaste, proud Dian, with a thankful howl, ere you creep to your resting-place." So saying, she turned once more to the boy, who stood shivering over-against her. And, " what," quoth she (again resuming her angry note), " what is this, foul pest ? and why is it that thou darest to stand by there with that idiot face of thine, while I am cherishing my darlings ? Have at him, pretty dogs, have at him ! Tear him life and limb, and see whether his blood be not the sweeter of the two."

And then, with hissing and grinding of her teeth, and furious clapping of her bony hands, she strove, as it seemed, to the uttermost to excite the obscene creatures against the boy ; and they, crouching with their bellies on the ground, and wagging their tails, began in truth to howl upon him terribly, while he, knife in hand, seemed to fear and to prepare him for their onset.

But when one of them did crouch nearer, and appeared to be really on the point of springing upon the lad, I could no longer refrain from calling out ; and, " Stop," said I, " cruel woman, for there are eyes that you think not of to take note of your wickedness. Stop, and call off your bloody dogs ; and stand upon your guard, boy, and be of good courage." And, at the same time, I hurled down one of the great loose stones that were on the top of the wall, which rolled on and bounded into the ditch beside them ; and the dogs, hearing the sound of the stone, immediately crept away yelping, and the old woman, huddling her cloak over her head, began to run

swiftly away from us, along the wall over which we were leaning. The boy only stood still for a moment, and looked upward towards the place where we were, and then he also fled along the shade of the wall, but in the opposite direction from that in which Pona was running.

And Dromo, whose teeth were chattering in his head, said to me, in a very piteous whisper, but not till all of them were quite out of sight, "Heaven and earth preserve us! was ever such madness as yours, to scare the witch from the place of her incantation, and to hurl a stone into the consecrated trench! Alas! for you and for me, sir—and, most of all, alas for Sextus—for I fear me after this we shall have no luck in counteracting the designs of Rubellia."

"Rubellia?" was my answer—"what! can you possibly imagine Rubellia to have any thing to do with this madness?"

"Imagine?" quoth he; "in good sooth, I like to hear you talking about imaginations, after what we have witnessed. Do you need to be told, that if things had gone well with that bloody woman and her foul ditch, we should never have been able to preserve Sextus from her clutches?"

"By the rod of Hermes, good Dromo!" said I, "this will never do. I shall believe much on your credit, but not things quite so extravagant as this."

To which Dromo made no reply, save a long, incredulous, and, I think, contemptuous whistle, which seemed to reach the ears of every owl between us and the Appian Way; with such a hooting and screeching did they echo its note from every funereal tower and tall cypress around us. And Dromo, when he heard that doleful concert, seemed to have all his dread redoubled within him, for he shook from head to foot in the uncertain moonlight, and I thought I could almost hear his heart knocking against his ribs, while I held his arm in mine; until, at last, he seemed to make one violent effort, and springing on his feet, said, "Come, Master Valerius, let us behave after all like men" (I smiled when he said so); "let us behave like men, and quit us bravely!

The hour has not yet come, if my Calabrian friend is to be trusted, at which the lady was to visit Pona in her dwelling. It is but daring a little more. If she has seen and known us already, then nothing can endanger us further; and if she hath not, we may escape again as well as this once."

"Well spoken," said I, "most shrewd Dromo, and like yourself; but what is it that you would have us do?"

"The first thing," he replied, "is what has already been too long delayed."

And in so saying, the Cretan produced from under his cloak a long fictitious beard, which he immediately proceeded to fix upon his own face with a string. A thin tall cap of black cloth was next brought forth, which he fastened in like manner around his brows, and a little piece of chalk, with which he once or twice rubbed over his black bushy eyebrows, completed a disguise, beneath which I should certainly have sought in vain to discover any trace of the natural countenance of Dromo. In short, after a few changes in the folding of his cloak, there stood before me a figure so venerably mysterious, that had I met it there unawares at midnight, and in the neighbourhood of so many tombs, I am sure, although of no superstitious temper, I could not have regarded it without very considerable awe and apprehension.

"Come now, good master," quoth he, "you are taller than I, pluck me a branch from the nearest tree, and think you shall confess I make a very tolerable sooth-sayer."

In this it was easy to gratify him; for there was an old willow just a few yards off, and its boughs were so dry with age that I soon abstracted a very proper wand for him. After receiving which, he stood for a moment leaning on it in a very dignified fashion, as if to rehearse an attitude worthy of his new vocation; and then said, "Well, sir, I think if the Lady Rubellia comes now, we shall be tolerably prepared for her. But I have no disguise for you; therefore, the moment you hear a foot-step, be sure you wrap your face in your gown, and stand behind me, for so shall you best consult both your own concealment and the dignity of this Assyrian. There is

no other way by which she can come from the Suburra, therefore we might stay very well where we are ; but I think it might be still better to await her coming where there are either tombs or larger trees to cast a shade over our equipage, in case the moon should take it into her head to be more kind to us than she was to Pona, and perhaps shine out with an unseasonable brightness."

"By all means," said I, "most venerable man ; and besides, the wind is rather chilly, therefore I shall be well pleased to have shelter as well as shade."

"You shall have both," quoth he, "and that without any very troublesome journey ; for there is a thick grove of pines only a little way on. I believe there is a very grand tomb in the midst of them, in case you should prefer to sit under it ; but I, for my part, shall be quite satisfied with the black shadows of the trees themselves. By-the-by," he continued, after some little pause, "it is odd enough that it should be so ; but I believe it is the very place where all that race of the Sempronii to which a certain young damsel belongs have been burnt and buried ever since Rome was a city. You cannot see their tomb yet ; but that is only from the thickness of the trees, some of which are, I suppose, even older than itself. Now I remember me, it was just there that they set up two winters ago the funeral pile of old Caius—I mean the father of the Lady Athanasia, whom you saw at Cato's villa. They are a very noble race, and although none of the richest nowadays, there is not a prouder in Rome. I saw the procession at that old man's funeral myself, and I think the images of his ancestors that they carried before him would have reached half-way from hence to the Great Road. Grim, dusty figures I trow they were ; but I doubt not there had been many a haughty captain among them when they were alive."

C. Gaston Pickman

25. Dec. 1860.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
الحمد لله رب العالمين

V A L E R I U S;

ROMAN STORY.

They'll sit by the fire, and presume to know what's done P the Capitol!
SHAKESPEARE

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II

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VALERIUS.

CHAPTER I.

THESE words were spoken as we were moving onward towards this same grove of pines ; and before he had made an end of speaking, we could clearly hear the wind sighing among their branches, and along the dry underground about the roots of their bare trunks. And on coming to them I found that he had said truly there was a tomb in the midst of them ; for a very noble high circular tower was indeed there, which, to judge from the grayness of its walls, and the luxuriance of the ivy that grew thereon, had the appearance of being at least as ancient as any of the surrounding trees. The only method of access to the inside of this tower seemed to be by means of a winding stair, which rose on the exterior from the ground to the summit—a method, by-the-way, not unusual in Roman sepulchres—and it was on one of the steps of the stair that I seated myself, where, between the shaded wall on the one side and the pine branches on the other, I was effectually concealed. As for Dromo, I know not whether it was that he coveted not exactly such close proximity to the stones of such an edifice, or that he preferred, altogether for his own sake, a situation of more conspicuousness ; but instead of ascending along with me, when I mounted

the steps, he took up a position beside one of the largest of the pines that rose out of the ground over-against me. The soil, however, where he stood was somewhat elevated, so that, leaning on his willow staff, he could still, not less than myself, overlook the path with a very commanding superiority.

I ought rather, indeed, to say, that he could have easily overlooked it, had there been light enough there at that time, for the purpose of looking at or overlooking any thing ;—but this was very far from being the case ; for though the moon had got rid of her clouds, and the sky, where any of it could be seen, was abundantly brilliant, the natural darkness of that funereal grove was such, that very little difference could be produced in the midst of it by any variation on the face of any nightly luminary. The gray tower itself alone received some of the moonbeams on one part of its curved surface ; but its contemporary trees participated not in any such illumination,—one solemn shade covering all things beneath the influence of their massy growth ; insomuch that even the white flowing beard of my pretended soothsayer could scarcely be distinguished by me, sitting right over-against the place where he had chosen to take his stand.

“I can scarcely see you, Dromio,” said I ; “but I think that speck must be your beard, and if so, I beg you would tell me what it is you really have in view by all this preparation ? Do you expect me to stay here on a tombstone all night, merely because you wish to have an opportunity of terrifying poor Rubellia by some ghost-like howl or other when she passes you ?—which, by-the-way, it seems by no means certain she will do at all. Or what is your purpose ?”

“Hush, hush, hush !” was his answer ; “ask me no questions, but listen, and hem thrice when you think you hear any footsteps coming—for young ears are the keenest. Hush, I say, for all will be of no use if there be any chatting between us.”

“Well, hush be the word,” said I, somewhat tartly, for I was not quite pleased with all this affectation of mystery. And accordingly silence was kept so strictly,

that, in spite of the chilness of the stone on which I sat, I presently fell into a sort of a dozing slumber.

By degrees, however,—nor, considering the hour and the fatigue I had undergone, is it wonderful that it should have been so,—my sleep must have become sufficiently profound, for I did not at first, on waking from it, very well remember either where I was or for what purpose I had come thither. And, indeed, I have little doubt my slumbers might have continued till daybreak, but for the interruption I am now to mention.

And yet it seemed as if even in my sleep I had been prepared for this by some strange anticipation ; for although it was a near sound of singing voices that dispelled my slumbers, and made me start from the stone on which I had placed myself, I could not help feeling as if that sound were not altogether new to me ;—whether it were that the half-sensible ear had been already ministering indistinctly to the dreaming spirit, or that some purely fantastic prelude had been vouchsafed to the real music I was destined to hear. I started up suddenly—that much is certain, and listened—with astonishment, yet not altogether with such surprise as might have been expected to attend a transition so hasty from sleep to waking, and from silence to the near neighbourhood of sounds at once so strange and so sweet. With breathless curiosity, nevertheless,—with awe,—and not entirely I think without terror,—did I listen to the extraordinary melody—which, after the pause of a moment, I became satisfied could proceed from no place other than the interior of that old circular sepulchre,—on one of the steps of the staircase leading to the summit of which, I had permitted myself to be overtaken with that deep slumber. Strange, as I have said, and yet passing sweet, were the notes that seemed to ascend out of the habitation of the noble dead into the nightly air,—wild, yet solemn, as if breathed from the bosom of a stately repose and a pensive felicity ; insomuch that almost I persuaded myself I was hearing the forbidden sounds of another world, and the thought came over me,—yet almost I think at that moment without further disturbing me,—what fearful interpretations the old

poets have affixed to such untimely communion, and how the superstition of all antiquity has shrunk from its omen.

My first impulse, after a moment had elapsed, was to call on Dromo, and I did so, at first in a low whisper, and then two or three times more loudly,—but all equally in vain, for no answer was returned to me; and though I strained my eyes in gazing on the place where I had last seen him, yet there I could perceive no trace whatever of any human figure; for the moonlight indeed showed with more distinctness than before the tall stem of the old pine-tree against which he had been leaning; but no motion, nor the least appearance of whiteness, could either my eyes or my imagination discover there. I might easily, you will say, have stepped across the road, and entirely satisfied myself; but I know not well what it was that nailed me to the place where I stood, and prevented me even from once thinking of doing so. The calm sepulchral music, my friends, still continued to stream from the recess of the mausoleum, and painless awe held me there, as if by a charm incontrollable. I gazed upward, and beheld the moon riding above the black pine-tops, in a now serene and cloudless heaven. The wind also had passed away, as it appeared, with the clouds it had agitated. The bird of night was asleep on her unseen bough; and all was silent as death, except only the dwelling of the departed; and a certain indescribable delight was beginning, as I gazed and listened, to be mixed with the perturbation wherewith at first I had been inspired.

And I know not how long I might have stood so, but while I was yet listening to this mysterious music, there was mingled with its expiring cadence the sound of a heavy footstep on the staircase above me, and looking up, I perceived in the moonlight the figure of a man, clad in a white gown, but having a naked sword stretched forth in his hand, immediately over the place whereon I was standing. I obeyed the first natural impulse, and leaped downward swiftly on seeing him; but this availed me nothing, for he also leaped, and almost before my feet had touched the ground, I felt the grasp of his

hand upon my shoulder, and that so strongly that I perceived plainly there was as little possibility of escape as of resistance. I made, therefore, no further effort, but suffered him to do with me as he pleased ; and he, on his part, said not a single word, but, still retaining his hold, pointed with his sword to the same steps from which I had descended, and compelled me to mount them before him, up to the very summit of the round tower.

" Why is this, sir ?" said I to the man ; " and whither do you conduct me ?"

" Peace," was all his answer ; and, in like manner as he had made me climb the exterior, so also he compelled me to begin the descent of a similar flight of steps, which led down from an aperture above, into the interior of the edifice. And although I must confess to you that I obeyed not this silent guidance without considerable fear, yet I strove as well as I could to control myself. I moved with a step in which I think there could not be perceived any trembling.

Yet you will admit that even had I been master at that moment of less firmness, I might have been excusable ; for, looking down, I perceived that a lamp was burning in the midst of the sepulchral tower far below me, and saw sitting around it a company of at least eight or ten persons, at whose mercy it was quite visible I must be placed. Neither, if I might judge from the demeanour of the person who was bringing me into their assembly, did there appear to be any great room for dependence on them ; for, as to themselves, not one of them looked up towards me as I was stepping down, and being wrapped in their cloaks, I had no means of discovering what manner of persons they were. The way in which I had been treated, however, by one of their number, was a sufficient evidence either that they conceived themselves to have been injured by my being there, or that they were capable of taking some undue advantage of my helpless condition. The calmness of their attitudes, and the recollection of the sounds that I had heard, inclined me to the former of these suppositions ; and when I perceived that not one of them stirred, even till

I had reached the lowermost step of the interior staircase, in this, without question, I already felt myself considerably strengthened.

"Behold," said my guide, as I at length touched the marble floor of the mausoleum itself—"behold proof, and that living, that my suspicions were not quite so groundless as you were pleased to imagine. Here is a man whom I found listening, even on the very steps of this tower. It is for you to decide what shall be done with the eaves-dropper."

With this the whole company sprung at once to their feet, and I perceived evidently, from the surprise expressed in their looks and attitudes, that until that moment not one of them had been aware of my approach. I was about to speak, and declare my innocence of any treachery, or even of any knowledge concerning the purpose of their assembly; but before I could do so, one of them, and I think the oldest of all that were present, having in an instant recovered the tranquillity which my arrival had disturbed, said to me, in a voice of the utmost gentleness, "Young man, what has brought thee hither, or who sent thee? Art thou indeed a spy, and was it thy purpose to betray our assembly?"

"Sir," said I, "I know nothing of your assembly, or of its purpose; I fell asleep by accident on the outside of this tower, and when I awoke, the music that I heard detained me."

"Examine the stripling," quoth he that had conducted me; "examine his person, and let us see whether there be no traces of suspicion about him."

"His looks belie him," replied the senior, "if you have cause for your suspicion. But if you will have it so, search the young man, that the thing may be made apparent how it really is."

And with that my guide, laying his unsheathed sword upon a table or altar of black marble, that was in the midst of the place, proceeded very leisurely to search my garments, and finding in my bosom the scroll which I had received from Thraso, he glanced on it for a moment, and then handing it to the senior, said, with something like a laugh, "Now, sirs, doubt ye if ye will;" and

so saying, the man resumed his sword, and leaned its point on the floor, as he stood by me.

"Before heaven—it is the book of the holy Luke!" said the other; "this is indeed suspicious. How came this scroll into thy hands, young man? Art thou aware that one of the books of the Christians has been found in thy bosom?"

"I know it," said I; "it is one of the books of their faith, and I have read in it this evening for the first time."

"Then thou art not thyself a Christian?"

"I received the book from one Christian," said I, waiving the question; "and I made promise to deliver it into the hands of another."

"Name the Christian who gave thee this book," said my stern guide.

"Thraso," I replied; "the same who died yesterday in the amphitheatre."

"Yes," quoth he again, "and I suppose it was there he gave it to you. Every one knows the name of Thraso. Name, if you please, the person to whom you are to deliver the book."

"You shall pardon me," said I, "that I will not. You may call me an eaves-dropper, if you will; but you shall find I am no traitor. It is a Roman—a noble Roman lady to whom I must give this book; and I would not tell you her name although you should slaughter me here in this tomb, which I have entered living and without guilt." And having said this, I folded my arms and stood still, abiding their will.

But scarcely had I finished the words, ere I felt a small trembling hand laid upon my shoulder, and looking round I perceived Athanasia herself, who whispered into my ear, "Valerius, was the book for me? if so, you may say it boldly, and I will vouch for your word."

"For you, lady," I answered in the same tone, "and for none other. You well know that I was present in Thraso's prison the night before his death; so far at least you can confirm what I have said."

"Sir," said she, then addressing the old man that had before questioned me, "I know this young man; and I

believe what he has said, and will be answerable for his fidelity. It was he that went in to Thraso the other night in his prison, and the book was intrusted to him by the old man that it might be given into my hands. His name is Valerius—Caius Valerius—and he is by birth a noble Roman."

"Say you so, lady?" interrupted my original conductor; "then I ask his pardon. I have wronged Caius Valerius; but both you and he must forgive me, for it must be confessed he was found in a very extraordinary situation."

"Even so," I replied; "I have nothing to complain of. I perceive that I am at present in an assembly of Christians; but he shall do me much wrong who thinks I bear any enmity to them; or, from all that I have yet seen or read, to the faith which they profess. I have read part of that book," I continued, "for I made promise to Thraso that I should do so before giving it to Athanasia; and I trust I shall still be permitted by her to read more of it before it is finally demanded from me."

"Oh, read it!" said Athanasia, gently again whispering to me. "Oh yes, read the book, Valerius, and may God enlighten the reader." And so saying, she herself took up the scroll from the table on which it was lying, and gave it again into my hands.

"There was also a letter for you," said I, receiving it, "but that I have left at home."

"No matter," said Athanasia, "you shall give me the letter and the book both together hereafter."

"In the mean time," said I, "I suppose it were better I should retire."

"Young sir," said the senior, "that is as you please; we have wellnigh made an end of our worship; but, if it please you, you are at freedom to abide with us till we all go towards the city. Stay, if such be your will; that which you may hear can at least do you no harm. Already, I doubt not, you have seen enough to despise the ignorant calumnies of our enemies."

And when he had said so, the old man walked to the side of the sepulchre, and took out from behind one of

the urns that stood there (ranged in their niches) a small casket, which, returning, he placed before him on the marble table. Then, opening the casket, he brought forth a silver goblet and a salver containing some little pieces of bread; and, untying from his neck a massive cross* of gold, he set that also on the table, between the cup and the salver. In brief, the Christian priest (for such, as you already see, he was) had finished his preparation, and was about to commence the administration of the blessed sacrament of the Eucharist. And when all the rest were kneeling around the table, Athanasia, laying her hand upon my arm, beckoned to me to kneel by her side in the circle; and so, indeed, I would have done in my ignorance, had not the priest himself pointed to a stool a few yards behind the lady, whereon, accordingly, I seated myself—apart from those who were to be privileged with the participation of those holy symbols.

Now scarcely had they composed themselves in their places, and listened to the first words of the appointed service, when I, sitting there by myself, thought, unless my ears deceived me, there must be a pattering of feet on the outer staircase of the tower; and deeming that it was so, my eyes instinctively, I suppose, were fixed upon the aperture, which, as I have told you, was in the high roof above the circle of the niched walls around me. Here, however, when I first looked up, there was indeed nothing to be seen but the round spot of the sky, far up in the midst of the marble roof; but while I was looking steadfastly thereon, it seemed to me as if that space were suddenly very much diminished; and thinking so, I could not refrain from starting up, and I know not whether some slight ejaculation might not have escaped from my lips. But so it was, that at the very moment of my starting up, there was heard distinctly the howling of dogs from the summit of the mausoleum, and immediately afterward there was a clapping of hands, and a voice, which I well knew could be none other but that of Pona, screamed high above their barking, "I have them—I have them:—here, here—I hold them—let them burst the net if they can."

* See *St. Chrysost. de Adorat. Crucis.* Also, *Conc. Nic. 2, Act. 4.*

And then the dogs howled more and more furiously, and though her screaming voice was still audible, it was no longer to be discovered what words they were which she was uttering.

These, however, which I have already repeated—and you would think the less of that, could I give you any notion of the tone in which they were uttered—were of themselves quite enough to disturb effectually the Christian priest, and the whole of those that were with him. Rising up hastily from their knees, they stood all together around the table, while the old man, having kissed reverently both the cup and the cross, restored them as quickly as he could to the casket from which they had been taken. But while the priest was doing this, he that had found me on the stair, appearing to revert into his suspicion, and looking sternly upon me where I stood, said, “Is this then the innocence which we spared? Is this the noble Roman for whom Athanasia pledged herself? Speak, brethren, what shall be done to this traitor, by whom, even more than by those dogs of the tombs, it is a shame for us that we have been hunted.”

And saying so, the man lifted up his sword again, and it seemed as if he would have smitten me to the ground without further question. But Athanasia, when she saw what he was doing, threw herself swiftly between him and me.

“For shame, Cotilius,” said she; “such suspiciousness is unworthy of a Roman knight.”

“You say well, noble damsel,” quoth the old priest, interrupting her; “but you might say also that such cruelty is unworthy of a soldier of Christ. Peace, peace, children; there is no evil in the youth, nor, if there were, would it be our part to avenge it.”

While he was saying this, three or four blazing torches were thrust down into the place from above, and Athanasia, leaning upon my shoulder, said, “Look up, look up, dear Caius, I see the helmets of soldiers. Alas!” she added, “am I not already here? why, if they will slay me, should they drag me away now from the tomb of my fathers?”

And I felt the trembling of her hands, and she leaned

with all her weight upon my breast ; and I know not, I will confess to you, whether at that moment I tasted more of pleasure or of pain. Of this at least I am sure, that at the price of any danger to myself alone, I would gladly have purchased that word of kindness, and that pressure of confidence.

But by this time several of the soldiers had already begun to descend the steps into the tower, and before another minute had elapsed, we found ourselves surrounded by the flame of their torches. And he that seemed to lead the party, after counting us one by one, said, turning to his companions, " Well, an old woman has told the truth for once ; here are even more I think than she warned us of. Come along, worthy people, come along ; you must not keep the tribune waiting for you all night, and our watch is wellnigh expired already. Come, come, mount the stair ; you know your own qualities, or, if you don't, this is no time for standing upon precedence. Come along ; it will take a good half-hour yet, I believe, to lodge you all safely in the Tullian ; and do you," he added, laying his hand on the hilt of Cotilius's sword, " do you, my good sir, allow me to save you the trouble of carrying this bauble."

Nor was the stern knight so foolish as to dispute the command ; but having yielded up his sword, he forthwith began to ascend the stair, one or two of the spear-men preceding him with their torches. The old priest followed, and so did all the rest ; the last that went up being, I think, Athanasia and myself.

CHAPTER II.

ON every side around the old tower, when I looked from the summit of it, I perceived foot-soldiers drawn up in a double line, while the road along which I had come with Dromo, was occupied by a band of horsemen, one of whom moved forward when he saw us descend.

ing, as if to take cognizance of the number and quality of the surprised assembly. His long cloak being muffled about his ears as he sat on horseback, and the shadow of his helmet falling deeply on the upper part of his countenance, I did not at first suspect who it was ; but he had not counted half the party to the superior officer behind him, ere I recognised him from the sound of his voice alone ; and who, think ye, should it be but my good friend Sabinus !

I do not think I ever yet saw surprise expressed so strongly as it was on the face of the jolly centurion, when his eye detected me. He checked his horse so sharply, that the animal bounded into the air as if he had been transfixd with an arrow ; and "Valerius !" quoth he, "ha ! by the life of Trajan, what is the meaning of this? Valerius in a Christian synagogue ! By all the gods, there must be some mistake in this matter." But before I, in my confusion, could make an answer to these exclamations, his eye chanced to glance on Athanasia, who, pale and trembling, still retained the support of my arm ; whereupon there was an end at once, as it seemed, of his extreme astonishment ; for, "Ha ! ha !" said he, in a quite different tone of voice, "there is a lady in the case, is there?" And then stooping in his seat he whispered, half-laughing, into my ear, "My most hypocritical smooth-face, you shall see what is the consequence of bringing these transatlantic pranks of yours to Rome. By Hercules, you wild dog, it may cost you some little trouble to get out of this scrape."

And when he said so, he at once turned his horse, and rejoining the troop, appeared to enter into close conversation with him who sat at the head of the line ; and I could see well enough from the gestures he used, and from the manner in which the other listened to him, that he was making some explanation which appeared by no means satisfactory to the person who heard it. Sabinus raised his voice very much as the colloquy proceeded, but I could catch nothing more than the sound of one or two most violent oaths, while, all the time, the tribune (for such he was) continued to shake his head in a way significant at once of doubt and determination. The

end of it was, that he pointed with his sword; and Sabinus, having apparently received a command he durst not dispute, forced his horse backward, at one plunge, into the place from which he had originally rode forth. And, whether the animal had been infected with something of the rider's passion, I know not; but it seemed as if, after he had compelled him into his station, it was no very easy matter to keep him there, for he pawed and pranced so violently, that I thought he would have thrown all his neighbours into disorder. The strong hand and knees of the centurion, however, prevented this, and the chafing Thracian was ruled into calmness.

But in truth I had no leisure for observing any thing further, for some other soldiers coming up, with led horses and mules in their hands, our party were immediately separated one from another, each, as it seemed, being destined to proceed to some peculiar place of safety, under peculiar guidance. I saw the old feeble priest lifted on a mule by one of the soldiers, and then hurried away towards the city, with a horseman on each hand of him. The fiery Cotilius, and one or two more, were compelled to follow, with similar attendance, in the same direction; others, again, had their horses' heads turned more to the westward, but all departed at great speed, and were soon lost to my view among the projections of the tombs. The last that remained to be disposed of were Athanasia and myself, and for a moment I had some hope that we might perhaps be sent to the same place; but this hope was in vain, and after I perceived that it was so, scarcely even was time permitted to me for bidding her farewell. To kiss her hand, and to whisper a single word of parting hope into her ear, was all I could do. A tear rolled from her cheek and fell upon my hand; yet she smiled faintly upon me, and, "Hope," said she—"yes, dear Valerius, Hope and Faith both go with me." And with that the pale maiden was separated from the arm to which she had trusted, and I saw her also mounted and borne away rapidly from before my eyes, in the midst of a cloud of the horsemen. While I was yet straining my eyes to gaze

after her, I found myself in like manner seized around the waist by a strong man, and lifted upon a horse, whose bridle one of those that were to guard me held in his hand ; and almost before I could look around me, we had escaped from the flare of the torches, and the crowd of the soldiery, and were stretching at a rapid pace, I knew not whither, although I suspected, from the wideness of the road, that we had already regained the Appian, and were proceeding in its course.

But I have forgotten to mention to you, that just at the moment when they were lifting Athanasia upon the mule that was to bear her from my sight, my eye caught a glimpse of the witch Pona, who was sitting at the root of one of the pine-trees, close to the tower. The two dogs whose barking we had heard before the soldiers broke in upon us were couched beside her as she sat ; and behind her stood, leaning against the tree, a figure wrapped in a rich red cloak, which I suspected to be a female also, but could not be certain, because the countenance was quite concealed in the folds of the garment. To this person, whoever it might be, the witch turned round eagerly, while the soldiers were carrying off Athanasia ; and I heard again, at the same moment, that low croaking laugh, the remembrance of which has power, even at this distance of time, to make me shudder when I think of it. I saw—I heard no more,—for, as I have told you, immediately afterward I also was carried away. In the midst of all the confusion, however, both of my own mind and of the scene around me, that hideous laugh of the old enchantress could not be heard without making an impression upon me ; and I think its note rung in my ear during half of the tempestuous ride which ensued.

I say tempestuous, for our hasty pace had not borne us to any great distance from the place where all these things occurred, ere the sky, which, as ye have heard, had all that night been sufficiently variable, began to exhibit appearances which they that rode by my side interpreted as significant of the approach of one of those nocturnal storms, to which, at that season of the year, the fair heaven of Italy is peculiarly subject. That they

apprehended somewhat of this sort I perceived from their looks, as they stopped for a moment to draw the hoods of their mantles over their brazen helmets ; for as to words, of these they uttered none, either to me or to each other, until our journey drew near to its close. For me, however, the numberless agitations through which I had passed in the course of the few preceding hours had, I suppose, communicated an unnatural measure of ardour to my boyish blood ; for neither did I feel the night-breeze chill me as we rushed through it, nor partook in any sort of the desire my companions testified to cover themselves from the rain, which seemed to be about to discharge itself out of all those black and lowering clouds now gathered above our heads from every region of the heavens. When, on the contrary, the first heavy drops fell on my face and hands, it seemed to me as if they were but the foretaste of a cooling delight, and I bared my burning forehead to the grateful moisture, with the eagerness of one who, in a parched and dry place, comes suddenly upon the green margin of a well-spring. Nor did this sensation subside even after the storm had thickened to the utmost, and the dusty roads had drunk abundantly of the plashing rain. The delight grew upon me as I proceeded. The strong wind blew with redoubled coolness upon my moistened neck—the rain-drops dashed big and heavy on my hot hands ; and I perceived that, as is the nature of those animals, the thunder which was mustering in the air filled my horse one moment with dread, and the next with a blind fierceness. At last the great voice of the thunder shouted overhead, and its echoes spread wide and far on either side, until they seemed to be absorbed to the left in the remote gulfs of the Apennine, and on the right-hand in the measureless bosom of the western sea—of which, as we galloped along the hill-side, the broad lightning (unless my fancy deceived me) revealed ever and anon a distant and melancholy glimpse.

We had passed a hill covered with towns, villages, and stately mansions (which I afterward learned was no other than the famous Alban), ere the storm subsided beneath the influence of the reddening dawn. Yet

even then we slackened not our pace, although the horses were by this time not a little exhausted with the swiftness of their motion, and the weight of their wet riders. On rode we in the growing light of the morning ; but I perceived ere long that we had left the wide and magnificent Appian Way, and were pursuing the line of a narrow road, which seemed to carry us more and more westward.

At length we halted for a moment on the brow of a declivity, where three paths separated ; and I perceived that among my guides there was some little uncertainty as to which of these it behooved them to follow. While they were muttering together, I looked and beheld at length the wide sea heaving far below, over what appeared to me to be a forest as mighty as I had ever seen in my native island.

Old hoary oaks leaned on either hand quite over the narrow pathway into which (after their brief pause of consultation) my conductors directed our course. Here and there, such a shield had those huge leafy boughs extended over the road, that the dust rose from among the feet of our horses as if all that night not one drop of rain had fallen there ; although elsewhere, in the absence of such mighty trees, the water lying across the path in pools testified abundantly that the tempest had not spared the forest any more than the champaign. Vast waving gulfs of bay and ilex, with here and there some solitary pine raising itself proudly in the midst, seemed to stretch away on either hand between the groves of those gigantic oaks.

The path we followed carried us ever deeper and deeper into the bosom of the woods ; and, at length, so buried were we in the windings of their stifling shade, that I had lost all notion of the direction in which I was moving ; until, after two or three hot hours, weary man and jaded horse were, I believe, equally delighted with snuffing once more the open current of the air. We reached not the edge of the forest, however, before I could hear distinctly the dashing of the Mediterranean waves ; and the last ascent we climbed laid open to my view a long sweep of the rolling waters, and their rocky

coast garnished everywhere with the richness of superincumbent woods. Far, very far, in the distant north, I thought I could recognise some of the stately towers of Ostium, bosomed apparently within the billows over which they presided. All between was one wide waste of wood and rock, save here and there a watch-tower perched on the margin, and whitened half-way up with the foam of the yet uncalmed sea.

Then, nor ever, could I look upon the waters of the great deep, without something of that filial yearning which seems so natural to every native of our sea-girt island. But neither could I contrast the condition in which I now approached it with the strong and light hopes under which I had so lately left it behind me, without many thoughts more sad and serious than as yet had frequently visited my bosom. What a strange brood of visions had passed before my eyes since, but a few days before, I stepped for the first time, light of heart, beneath the shadow of those far-off bulwarks! What new emotions had arisen within my breast in the interval! How had every sense been gratified! how had every dream of imagination been exceeded! Yet what a void had been created within—what a void felt—not, alas, filled! Alas! said I to myself at one moment, why is it that I have been subjected to all these novelties? Had I not done better to have remained, after all, where life flowed ever calmly—where affection hung over me like a protecting buckler, and my soul could sleep in the security of unbroken faith? But this was only for a moment. The thoughts of Athanasia haunted me more deeply and more firmly—I thought over every word she had spoken—every look of hers rose up in succession to my memory, with all the vividness of a beautiful and a troubled dream. I seemed to feel as if she were yet present beside me, the trembling of her pale fingers upon my shoulder—I kissed the hand on which her parting tear had fallen, as if it were yet wet with the dear moisture. When I thought of the perils in which she must now be enveloped—of the pains she must have suffered—must at that moment be suffering,—it was as if I could have burst bands of iron,

like flax, from off my hands. When a glimpse of the darker future opened before, I shuddered, and, urging my poor horse onward in the recklessness of total abstraction, I perceived that even my guides pitied the visible agony wherein all my boiling spirit was involved.

We stopped before the gate of one of the watch-towers, which, as I have told you, I had seen scattered along the edge of the sea. But this, when we came up to it, appeared to me a great deal larger than I had expected to find any of them. The narrow way along which we had been riding, brought us close to its gate, on the side towards the land; but the rock shelving rapidly on the other side gave it the semblance, at a little distance, of being suspended over the waves.

It was a building of rude and apparently very antique structure, the under part, where the door was, square—but the upper circular; as is, for the most part, the old Roman fashion in such erections. And this, indeed, I doubt not, might have stood there long enough to have shown a beacon, when some fleet of Syracuse or Carthage darkened the blue sea over-against the Lestrigonian bay, renowned in old song, or the snow-white promontory of Gaïeta. Now, however, it was easy to see it had been devoted to purposes of a very different order.

One of the soldiers dismounted forthwith, and began to knock rather violently at the door; but some little time elapsed ere any sound from within responded to the clamour he raised. At last, however, the hard and withered face of the keeper of the tower made its appearance at a little opening a short space above the door, and then the helmets of my companions passed, I suppose, for a sufficient warrant, for in a twinkling we heard the bolts creaking, and the old postern was soon set ajar for our in-going. It would be more proper to say, in the first instance, for the out-coming of the keeper above mentioned; for, I assure you, that person would have thought it a very strange thing for any one to be admitted into the entrance of his old tower, before

he had scrutinized him on the outside of it, with his own authoritative and piercing eyes.

And great indeed as were the troubles of my mind at that moment, I swear to you I could scarcely forbear from laughing outright, when this venerable personage did present himself at the threshold of his garrison. Imagine to yourself a tall, thin, skinny man of three-score years, with a face as dry and yellow as ye have seen on the outside of a pie, and hair as white as ever the skill of a confectioner could represent, and legs bearing, it may be, the same sort of proportion to the feet below them which the shaft of Saturn's scythe usually does to its blade. Clothe the nether part of this absurd figure in a pair of Dacian or Gaulish breeches, throw a very decent-looking but somewhat threadbare toga over his shoulders, and, to finish the outfit, deck his head with a military casque of the true Macedonian cut, that is to say, sitting close and compact above the ears, and topped with a bristling plume of horse-hair, the ends of which fell down on his shoulders, as thickly as if they alone had been intended to turn the edge of a sword in the assault.

He stood with an air of great dignity beneath his lintel, and listened with the most profound gravity to the message which one of the Prætorians whispered into his ear. On this conclusion, he shrugged his shoulders, and regarding me (who by this time had also dismounted) with a glance, made up, I think, in pretty equal proportions, of surprise, contempt, and curiosity, signified by the motion of his hand that we might all three enter. He whistled at the same moment, and there came forth a very young and comely damsel, who, with many blushes and smiles, took possession of the reins of our horses.

"Stand there," quoth he, "stand there, little Cestia, and see if there be never a handful of corn to be got for the prince's cattle,—stand there, and we shall be with you again anon." And then he also whispered something into the maiden's ear, and I saw her looking at me from under her eyelids with an expression of very uncommon curiosity. Two or three curly-pated

urchins, of different sizes, joined her at the same moment, and to them, in her turn, the maiden whispered; whereupon the eldest of the children, retreating behind her, eyed me earnestly along the skirt of her tunic, while the younger ones continued to gaze where they were, with looks of open stupidity and wonder. Of all this I could make nothing at the moment, but when we had got fairly into the inside of the tower, I heard the children whispering distinctly enough to each other, "A Christian! a Christian! a Jew! a Jew!" and then I was at no loss to comprehend the secret cause of all the astonishment I had observed.

The lower part of the tower, into which I had now been conducted, seemed to form nothing more than one huge, bare, and quadrangular apartment, serving, I supposed (and rightly), at once as hall and vestibule to the upper chambers contained within the walls. A small flight of steps, in one of the corners, seemed to afford the only means of access to what was above; but from the position of a door immediately below these, I suspected a part of the prison must be placed under ground. Close beside this door there stood, upon a very rude pedestal, a still more rude bust, either of Jupiter, of Apollo, or of Hercules. The workmanship was such, that I could not be very certain which of the family it was whose features this was intended to represent, nor whether the principal appendage was meant to be a club, a lyre, a bow, or a thunder-bolt; but it did not escape my observation that the old keeper crept as close as he could to the sacred stone, as soon as I stepped over the threshold. The guards who had come with me did not, however, permit him to remain very long under the shadow of that protecting tutelary; for, saying that it behooved them to return as soon as possible to Rome, they insisted on his extending to them some portion of the same kindness with which, as I have said, he had already desired their horses to be treated by the young woman.

"Come," said one of them, "old comrade, although you have taken to the gown yourself, you must not quite forget the old Sagum. I'll be bound such a snug

situation as this was not given to one that had never distinguished himself. May I ask, if you have enjoyed it long? or is it only since the present Cesar's accession that you have been so fortunate?"

"Forget the old Sagum!" quoth the senior. "By the eye of Mars, I believe I had worn out a score of them before any one that now hears me was born. I promise you, I shall never forget the Sagum. Here, boy—here, Anthony—little Anthony—bring out the cheese, and ask your mother for the key, for these gentlemen must drink before they depart."

One of the little boys that had come out to the door on our arrival re-entered speedily, hearing this command, and busied himself in setting forth a wooden board, whereon he placed in great order a huge piece of yellow cheese, and a heap of crisp white cakes of rye. A large jug of water also garnished the mess; but there seemed to be a little less of diligence, or more of difficulty, about the wine.

"Fall-to, comrades—fall-to," says he of the tower; "plain fare is ours, but ye have a hearty welcome for your own sakes, and, under favour, for the sake also of my dear old commander, whose likeness graces the pum-mels of your swords. Fall-to briskly; but where is the wine, Anthony? Don't you see we are waiting? Am I not master in this fastness?"

"But my mother has the key," quoth the boy.

"Even so, little spark," replies the senior; "therefore fetch it from her quickly, and tell her, Anthony," added he in a lower note—"be sure you tell her, there are two gentlemen of the Prætorians here, with a young Christian, who is to be our prisoner."

With that the little boy began to ascend the stairs within the tower, but still in a very leisurely manner. He knocked at a door apparently half-way up, and I heard him deliver the whole of his message; for he spoke it perhaps rather more loudly than had been intended. But she to whom it was addressed seemed to hear it with any thing but that benignity with which poets have ever decorated the transmission of the gifts of Bacchus.

"What, jackanapes!" quoth she, in a voice loud, boisterous, and all but masculine—"must he send you to tell his lies for him?—Prætorians and Christians, quotha! Here is a pretty lie got up, sirrah. But hark ye, youngster, tell this father of yours, who will be the ruin of us all, that though Trajan himself were in the tower, *he* should not have one drop till mid-day, and then not a hairbreadth above the thread that I have tied round the blue goblet. Prætorians indeed! ha! ha! ha! Get you down-stairs, little Anthony, and learn to lie more cunningly the next time."

"Mother, there are certainly two soldiers below. Cestia is holding their horses at the gate; and they have brought a young man with them, who, they say, was caught eating a little child in a tomb last night, and I suppose he must be a Christian."

Some more words passed between them, but the old man made such a clattering on his trencher, and talked at the same time so loudly to the soldiers, that I could not understand the rest of what was said. However, little Anthony had certainly been gifted with some powers of persuasion, for many minutes did not elapse (although it is true the yellow cheese had time enough to receive many mortal gashes) ere down of a surety came in proper person the lady of the tower. The sound of her descending step was so heavy on the stair, that before she appeared I was prepared for the entrance of a very portly female; but her bulk, notwithstanding, astonished me when I did see her. In spite of her enormous dimensions, however, she had evidently been at some period, no doubt a pretty distant one, something of a comely person. Features, in themselves small and handsome, were seen to no great advantage, cased in an immense supererogatory circumference of cheeks and chin; and an absurdly tidy foot glanced from under ankles most disproportionably massive. A string of amber beads floated to and fro on the ocean of her bosom. She had fine golden bracelets on her arms too, but they were only half seen, being almost buried in fat; and, to crown the whole, she wore a flaxen wig, which did not entirely conceal the original dark bristles

below. At the girdle of the amazon hung, on the right side, the much desiderated bunch of keys, being balanced on the left by a dagger and toothpick-case, almost of equal dimensions.

Her face seemed to be flushed with the promise of a storm when she came in, but the sight of the two horsemen, I suppose, quieted all her suspicions, for she satisfied herself with saying to her husband, "You stupid old fool, why did you not come up and let me know the gentlemen were here sooner? and then to send children with your messages, whom nobody can trust to!" A glance of high scorn accompanied these agreeable words; and then, her face assuming an expression of the utmost cordiality, she went up and shook hands with each of the soldiers where they sat; and, "Welcome," said she, "comrades, a hearty welcome to the sight of your helmets. By Jove, I thought we should never have any thing more to do in the old tower!—May I be poisoned, if I have heard the jingle of a cuirass in the hall since the first week of Nerva. Here, boy, take the keys, and bring out the biggest bottle you can see; for the gentlemen shall see what it is to be in the dwelling of an old campaigner—Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" re-echoed the husband, receiving and opening the bottle; "you must know we are both of us old campaigners. You must know my wife is a Spaniard, and has been over half the world with me in her day."

"I honour a lady who has followed the camp," quoth one of the soldiers, holding up a large cupful of the wine; "and may this draught choke me, if I honour her the less either because she is a fine woman or because she is the countrywoman of Cesar."

"That indeed she is," replied the old man: "she was born in the same town; and I think they are children of the same—"

"Hold your tongue, fool," interrupted the lady; "I should like to know why you are able to tell my history better than myself. Here's to you all, gentlemen; and here's to Trajan the glorious Roman prince, who is an honour to Rome and to Spain, and to all the world."

By Jove," she continued, slapping the table with her hand, "I remember him when he stood no higher than this board, for I was born and bred up in sweet Italica, and I have him before me, as it were but of yesterday riding on a little white pony that he had, and that upon the banks of the prettiest stream that ever my eyes shall see. Come, fill your cups, gentlemen of the Guard Cesarian; there shall never a man under my roof drink out of a half-filled goblet to the great Cesar!"

"Will *you* drink to Cesar, young man?" quoth one of the soldiers, turning to me; "will you drink honestly to the emperor, in case you also have a full cup given you? and, by-the-by, I think you must have almost as much need of it as any of the rest."

I nodded assent to the proposition, and the matron, for the first time, deigning to cast her eyes on me, said, "Come, Master Christian, they say you were caught eating a raw child, but may I be so dieted myself if I believe it; for I've seen a good deal both of peace and of war in my day, and I never yet knew anybody that preferred such fare when he had choice of any other. Come along, draw a stool for yourself, and try whether a piece of rye-cake and cheese won't serve you this morning." And while I was complying with this courteous invitation, I heard her whisper to one of my guards,— "By Jove, 'tis a proper lad, after all; is this true that they have told me of him?" The soldier shook his head in return, and looked very sagacious, but I don't think he said any thing. "Ay, ay," quoth she; "prudence in a Prætorian! this is something new, however. By heavens" (sinking once more into her whisper), "by heavens, I believe the young man has a red edge to his gown. What is his name? who is he?"

The soldier shook his head again, and I heard him whisper,— "By the life of Cesar, you know as much about him as any of us. There was a whole cluster taken last night a little way beyond the Capene Gate, and he was one of them; but what they were about, or who he is, I know not, only he is certainly somebody, for I saw our centurion salute him."

"I saw him with Sabinus," whispered the other soldier, leaning across the board,— "I saw him, I am

quite sure of it, along with the centurion and a gallant company the last day the amphitheatre was open; they sat together all the day, and appeared quite familiar."

"I pray you, sir," quoth the lady, raising her voice, "I pray you fill your cup, and here I pledge you to our better acquaintance. You shake your head—well. But what must be, must; and while you are with us, we may at least be good friends."

"Thanks," said I, complying with her command, and indeed I was sorely athirst; "here, then, is health to all present; and fair health to the great Trajan, says no one here more heartily than I, Spaniard or Roman."

So saying, I drank off the wine, and setting down the goblet, I believe I said, "Excellent, by Jove," or something of that sort; for they all started when they heard what I said, and the old woman called out lustily, "Fill him another cup to the brim, whether he be Christian or not. The young man at least swears by the gods, and drinks to the prince. May worse never cross our threshold, say I."

"The old man," said one of the soldiers, turning to the hostess, "the old man that was killed the other day in the amphitheatre for his superstition might have saved his head, even at the last moment, if he would have done as much."

"Well, well," quoth she again; "let every one mind his own matters, and I shall mind mine. Have you brought any money with you, young man?"

"Not much," said I, for to me the question was addressed, "not very much, I think;" at the same time taking out a purse, which, from good luck more than foresight, was, after all, very tolerably supplied.

"No matter," quoth the amazon; "no matter whether you have much or little with you. If you have not much, you shall send to my good friend the centurion Sabinus, and he will give you more. You shall have the best room in the tower, however; and (bating child's flesh), whether you be Christian or not, by the pillars of Hercules, you shall have the best we can give you. Husband, bring down our book, and let the gentleman enter his name with his own hand. It has been useless

for a long time, I trow, but you'll find it in the old place below your bedstead. Come, stir, old eyebrow; must you have me do every thing, and disgrace you before our good comrades?"

The ancient did bestir himself, whether merely for the pleasure of obeying his spouse, or from curiosity to discover my name, or from mixed motives, I shall not take upon me to determine. Having drained his cup, however, to the foundation, he certainly rose from table, and limping up the staircase, ere long returned with a musty scroll of parchment, which, having unfolded and blown away the dust from it, he forthwith presented to me. I glanced over the record and found in it the names of various persons, all apparently entered in their own handwriting; and most of them, as the woman had already given room to suspect, bearing date in the troublous reign of Domitian. The last name was that of Marcus Protius Lamontanus, who, as it seemed, had been set free from his confinement immediately on the accession of Nerva; so I took it for granted he had been one of the victims of Domitian's insane oppression, and immediately under his I wrote my own name with that of my father.

The woman seized the parchment before the writing was dry, and handing it to one of the soldiers, said, "Read aloud, if it please you—let us hear how the gentleman is called." But the soldier, being apparently no great clerk, shuffled the scroll into the hand of his companion, who, equally puzzled I suppose, handed it back to the lady of the tower. It was then, at last, that she condescended to call her husband into council; and he, assuming without question an air of no inconsiderable importance, pronounced forthwith, very distinctly, the name as it was written. But when he came to the name of my father, the old man, dropping the scroll, turned to me with a face of infinite surprise, and said, "So preserve me the power of Jove! I believe you must be the son of the same Valerius who was centurion in the ninth legion during the wars of the great Agricola."

"You have guessed rightly; I am the same."

"Then the more is the pity," he replied, in a grave

voice, and rising from his seat; "the more is the pity that you should have entered, in such case as this, the dwelling of one that was a true soldier beneath the eagle of your father; the more, I say, is the pity, young gentleman. But forgive me if in any thing we have been disrespectful."

"There is no occasion," said I, "for any such apology. I am here as a prisoner, and have been treated with all courtesy beyond what a prisoner could expect."

"By Jove!" interrupted the spouse, "I thought I had some knowledge of the young gentleman's pretty face from the beginning. Well, for all that has come and gone, I hope ten years hence he will be as fine a man as his father was the day he slew the Caledonian giant, and tumbled him from his chariot in front of all the line—yes, in sight of Galgacus himself. It was the same day," said she, turning to her lord, "that you were taken prisoner, and driven away into the woods."

"As witness these marks," quoth the man; and with that he instantly stripped open his tunic, and displayed part of his breast stamped with various figures of blue and yellow, after the Caledonian fashion, and bearing withal the traces of one or two very formidable wounds. The Prætorians regarded the exhibition with great indifference; but you will believe I could not see without interest scars that had been received beneath the banners of my father.

There was an obvious restraint, after all this, in the behaviour of the whole of the party; for although the huge bottle was wellnigh exhausted, they had not got enough to make them feel quite at ease in the presence of one whose rank they had discovered to be such as mine. The woman, on her part, redoubled her kindness; but seeing that I interrupted their merriment, I soon requested her to show me the place where I was to be confined. And, indeed, as you may imagine, I had by this time not a little need of repose.

Both she and her husband accordingly arose to usher me to my prison. I gave money to the soldiers, and requested them to inform Sabinus of the place to which I had been conveyed; but did not choose to write any

thing, either to him or to Licinius, until I should have had a little time for reflection.

I then followed the ancient pair to the upper part of the tower, where I was lodged in a small chamber, the open window of which afforded a wide prospect of the sea, but with difficulty permitted my eye to take in even a little strip of the rocky margin. A single low couch was almost the whole of its furniture.

Here, having summoned a tall young clown to keep guard behind the door, they left me to my reflection; but such had been my fatigue, that, in spite of all the anxieties which surrounded me, I ere long fell fast asleep. The blessed playfulness of nature carried me far from Rome and Italy, back to the green woods of the island where my father had achieved deeds of glory, and my mother had tended my infancy beneath the shadow of her own trees. Of all that I had seen since I left home, Athanasia only glided before me in my slumber; and she (such was the sweet mockery) appeared smiling, happy, and serene.

Ere I awoke, the calm sea was already purple below me, and the broad sun about to plunge beneath the waters.

CHAPTER III.

BUT neither purple sea, nor golden sky, nor all the divine tranquillity of the evening air, could sooth my mind into repose, after I had once awakened to a sense of the situation into which I had been brought—I should say rather of the situation in which Athanasia was placed; for, in truth, compared with her probable suffering, all I could suffer in my own person appeared to me as nothing;—I was a man. For myself, I could not in seriousness fear any calamity worthy of the name; if such should come, it must be my business to wrestle with it as I might. But to think of her, young, beauti-

ul, innocent, and of all to which she might be exposed amid the rude hands in which I had left her,—even this of itself, without plunging deeper into the distant future, was more than sufficient to press upon all my spirits with a subduing and irresistible weight.

Yet the admirable regulation of all the details of public procedure, under the then emperor's administration, on the one hand, and the strong necessary influence of Athanasia's noble family, on the other; these considerations, it is true, recurred from time to time to my harassed recollection, and broke, or at least relaxed, for the instant, the bonds of my anxiety.

The sound of my footsteps, as I paced in my perplexity from one end of the apartment to the other, had, I take it for granted, reached the ears of the people below; for many minutes had not elapsed ere the wife of the old soldier entered, bearing in her hand a goblet of wine, and a supply of fruit and cakes, which would have been more than sufficient for the supper of one as easy and as happy as I was otherwise. To her first salutation, which was equally cheerful and courteous, I could with difficulty bring myself to make any reply, but she exerted herself so much in arranging every thing for my convenience, that I could not be insensible to the kindness of her meaning, nor suffer her to depart without acknowledging it. But I heard her whisper, after she had left me, to one of her children who had been waiting behind the door—"Poor young man, he is in a sad state; you see what it is, child, to have an evil conscience. He has denied the gods, and no wonder that they permit evil thoughts to torment him. You remember what the priest told us about those terrible Furies, whom Jupiter lets loose upon mortals, when he is thoroughly provoked with their perversity."

"Mother," replied the child, "you told papa he was a bad man for drinking so much wine every day. I hope Jupiter will not let loose the Furies upon poor papa."

"Hush!" quoth she, "do not speak of such a thing. I hope papa will listen to me, and that the reason I speak will be enough. But this is quite another thing, Anthony; for this poor young gentleman is a Christian, and

they say believes neither in Jupiter, nor in Mars, nor in sacrifices, nor in auguries : for my part, I tremble when I think of it. But his father was a great and a pious man, and all his kindred are noble ; and let us hope he may repent and be prevailed upon to acknowledge the deities, for otherwise the Furies will torment him alive, and who knows what fearful things may be his portion when he is dead ! And as for that, they say the emperor is determined not to permit one of them to live ; for there is no saying how far their wickedness might extend itself—evil is always infectious.”

I heard no more of her conversation with the child, but it was not long ere my attention was attracted by one carried on at a greater distance below me, in which you will not be surprised that I should have felt myself much more interested, even although the distance was such that I could not distinguish one word that was said. I knew from the first moment that it was impossible I should be mistaken—I was perfectly certain it was Sabinus himself who was now talking with the old woman ; and I at once suspected the worthy centurion, having learned from the soldiers who carried me off to what place they had conveyed me, had undertaken this speedy journey for the purpose of comforting me in my confinement. The kindness with which he had treated me from the beginning of our acquaintance had been such, that I could have no occasion to wonder at his exerting himself to discover me ; but I confess this alacrity was more than I had been prepared for, and I waited only for the moment when he should enter my apartment to throw myself upon his bosom, and intrust all my troubles to him, as to a friend and a brother.

There was something, however, which I could not at all comprehend in the merriment which seemed to be reigning below on his arrival. Loud peals of laughter from the jailer's wife interrupted the uniform hearty tone of the centurion's voice ; and the feeble treble of the old soldier himself was stretched ever and anon to the utmost, in a sort of ineffectual attempt at a chuckle. What could be the occasion of so much merriment, at such a moment, I could by no means understand. But the

steps of the party were soon distinguishable upon the stair, and I heard enough during the latter part of their ascent, to enlighten me as to the source of the mirth, if not satisfy me of its propriety.

At last in they came, and the centurion, embracing me affectionately, thrust into my hand, without preface, a piece of parchment, which I perceived to be nothing less than an order for my immediate dismissal from confinement, signed by one of the Roman magistrates. Then taking off his riding-cap, and rubbing with his handkerchief his most audacious and soldier-looking brows, "My dear boy," quoth he, "I see you are going to thank me, but don't wound my modesty by any fine speeches. There was war before Helen; have a better care another time, and don't pay Rome such a poor compliment as to say that you can find nobody to flirt with but a Christian damsel, and no place for flirtation but a gloomy old tomb, lined from top to toe with urns and lachrymatories. My honest friend here was quite frightened with the idea of having such an unbelieving reprobate as they said you were, under the same roof with her children. But now her fears are dispelled, for good souls are always tolerant to the little vagaries of young blood; so thank your hostess, my lad, kiss her hand, take one cup to the health of the old tower, and tighten your girdle; for you must know you have a little bit of a ride before you ere bedtime."

"Ha, ha, ha!" quoth the woman; "my Master Sabinus had always such a merry way with him! Well, who should have thought, when the soldiers brought him in with such a show of mystery, that it was all for kissing a young lady by moonlight! ha, ha, ha! I protest to Jupiter, they would have made me believe he had been caught eating an infant; but I thought from the beginning there must be some mistake in the matter; and I was sure enough it was so, when I found out from whom he derived those pretty blue eyes of his. But still I cannot quite pardon him. Well, well; we must e'en take good hope he will mend ere he die."

"Die!" replied the centurion; "do you talk of dying to one that has scarcely yet begun to live! Come, come,

Valerius, I hope, after all, you shall never get into a worse scrape."

"And if I do," said I, "I hope I shall always be equally fortunate in my jailers."

"By the beard of Jove!" quoth Sabinus, "it needs no great skill to see that you have been fortunate in that respect. I swear that, if the truth were known, you are almost as unwilling to be taken out of this tower now, as you were last night to be taken away from another."

"O Master Kæso," quoth she again, "when will you have done with your joking? ha, ha! Well, your father loved a jest in his time himself; but now he, I suppose, is quiet enough. And how is the old gentleman, and how does he wear? Can he still set in his porch of a fine morning, and listen to the news, as he used to do, with his cup of old Falernian at his knee?"

"I trust in all the gods, good dame," was his answer, "I trust the old grasshopper can still chirp when the sun shines. But, to tell you the truth, it is long since I have seen him; and if this young blade has no objection, I mean to pay him a visit this very night. I am only just come home from Britain, you must know, and have not yet had leisure to salute my Lares since my return. So to horse, my boy, Valerius; old folks go early to bed, and I swear to you I shall be ill-pleased if I don't arrive in time to partake of the sleeping-cup."

I said something about being very anxious to return as soon as possible to Rome; but the centurion answered me with another shout of laughter, and saying, "Come, come, she's safe enough, I'll warrant her,—I suppose you think every one gets out of jail as easily as yourself,"—seized me by the arm, and began to force me towards the staircase.

In short, I found it was out of the question to disapprove of any of the schemes of Sabinus; so, having saluted the old woman, and flung my purse to her children (who, by-the-way, still regarded me with looks of considerable apprehension), I accompanied my friend with a good grace to the door of the old tower. I made inquiry before I went forth concerning the old soldier likewise; but I could easily gather from the expression

of face with which his wife accompanied her indistinct reply, that he had, long before that time, reached a state in which she felt little desire to exhibit him. The centurion whistled as he stepped across the threshold, and there forthwith drew near a soldier, wearing the Prætorian helmet (now sufficiently familiar to my sight), and leading in his hand three horses. In the rear I recognised, not without satisfaction, the busy countenance of my friend Dromo, whose ass did not appear quite so eager to join the party as its rider.

A few sturdy thumps, however, at last brought the Cretan close to us, who saluted me with great appearance of joy, and then whispered into my ear, "Great Jove! we must keep silence for the present. What a story I have to tell when we are alone; and, by Heavens! I suppose there is one to hear likewise—but all in good season. We must not crack nuts before monkeys. I have a letter for you," he added, "from Sextus, and another from Licinius; but you shall not have them till we are done with our ride."

The centurion sprung with great agility on the back of his trusty war-horse, who seemed to rejoice in the feeling of his weight; and we were soon in motion. I asked no questions, either about the course we were to pursue, or the distance at which the place of our destination was situated; but rode by his side so silently that he bestowed on me many good-natured rebukes, for suffering a little affair of love to distress me so greatly.

"Cheer up now, good Valerius," quoth he, "and do not make me repent of carrying you to my father's house, by showing the old man, who has had enough of troubles in his day, such a countenance as must make him think of Orcus, even although he did not know himself to be near its gates. It is more than a year since I have seen him, and, by Jove! he must not have occasion to reproach me with bringing him a melancholy guest."

This sort of speech he repeated so often that I at last thought the best way would be to tell him frankly the true history of the adventure, from whose immediate

consequences to myself he had so kindly delivered me. I told him; therefore, every thing about both Thraso and Athanasia, and, indeed, kept nothing from him in the whole matter, except only what referred to the impression made on my own mind by what I had read of the Christian book; for, as to this subject, it was one which I totally despaired of being able to make him in any measure comprehend; and besides, the state of my own mind was still so uncertain in regard to it, and my information so imperfect, that I could not trust myself with speaking of it to any one, until I should have had leisure for more both of reading and of reflection. On hearing, however, who Athanasia was, and on perceiving how deeply I was interested in her, the kind centurion was not only quite satisfied that my melancholy demeanour was not inexcusable, but, entering like a true friend into so much as he understood of my troubles, he assumed, as he rode by my side, an air of seriousness and concern which, in spite of all the kindness I had experienced at his hands, was more than I had expected.

He preserved total silence for some minutes after hearing my story, and then, shaking his head, said, "In truth, my dear Valerius, you have very much distressed me by this communication. I thought it was merely some little idle frolic, born of an hour, and to be forgotten in a day; but if things be as you have told me, I cannot refuse you all my sympathy. Would to Heaven I had it in my power to offer you more!"

"Dear Sabinus," said I, "I know not how to thank you. You saw me but a few days ago the merriest young fellow that ever trod the pavement of Rome. You saw me happy in the moments that passed, and full of glad hopes for all that were to come; but now I feel myself quite changed in all things. Almost I wish I had never left my British fields; and yet, if I had staid there, I should never have seen Athanasia."

"Poor fellow!" quoth he, laying his hand on the mane of my horse, "I perceive there is, indeed, no trifling in your case. Yet compose yourself; for I see the tears are standing in your eyes. Compose yourself, and consider that whatever chances there may be in your

favour will never be increased or bettered by despondence." He paused another minute or two, and proceeded—"The worst of the whole is this new bitterness of Cesar against these Christians. Except during Nerva's time, indeed, there was always some punishment to be feared by them, in case of being detected; but there was a way of managing things in almost every case, and people were well enough disposed to grant immunities, which were always attended with some good to the Fisk. Nero and Domitian, to be sure, acted otherwise—but then these were madmen; and besides, they did so only by fits and starts. But now, when a prince like Trajan has really taken up the matter, it is no wonder that one should think of it a good deal more seriously. One cannot help thinking he must have had some good reason before he began—that is one thing; and having once begun, he is not the man to drop it lightly—that is another and a still more weighty consideration. Do you think there is positively no chance of the poor girl giving up this foolish dream, when she finds what a condition it has exposed her to?"

"No," said I; "I am sure she will not, nor can I wish it should be otherwise with her."

"Well," he resumed, "I enter into your feelings so far, my dear friend, on that point likewise. By Jove! I cannot imagine you to have been so deeply smitten with a girl of a flighty unsteady character. But then this is not a case to be considered or talked upon on common principles. It is no light thing to be exposed to such examinations as are now set afoot for these people; and if she behaves herself so resolutely as you seem to expect, what is the end of it? I consider it highly probable—for there is no friendship in uncandid speaking—I consider it as highly probable that, in spite of all her friends can do, they will banish her at the very least; scarcely dare I speak of it, but even worse than banishment has heretofore befallen Romans—ay, and Roman ladies too, and quite as high in birth and place as Athanasia."

"My dear Sabinus," said I, "do not imagine that now, for the first time, all these things are suggested to me.

Imagine rather how, thinking of them continually, and unable for a moment to expel them from my mind, I have spent these miserable hours ever since she was taken away from my sight. Her friends too—her relatives, alas! what must not be their alarm and consternation—if, indeed, they know any thing of what has happened—but that, I think, is scarcely to be supposed. Her absence, however, must of itself be sufficient to render them utterly wretched. Her poor friend Sempronius—alas! what grief must be hers.”

“The thing was done at such an hour, and with so much despatch,” quoth the centurion, “that I think it is almost impossible it should have made much noise as yet. If there was in the family no suspicion that the young lady had any connection with any of these people, you may depend on it they must be in a state of the most perfect perplexity. How will they account for her absence? They will perceive well enough that she had gone out in secret during the night. I lay my life they take it for granted she has had some private intrigue, and has gone off with her lover.”

“Alas, Sabinus, when they hear the truth, it will be still worse than this in their eyes. Yet it appears fit that no time should be lost in making them acquainted with the real state of the case. Her two uncles, Lucius and Velius, must both be informed of it. And yet, how is it that I, who have never seen the one, and have but just been introduced to the other, shall venture upon making such a disclosure to them? Oh, Sabinus, I foresee that, in all these things, I shall have need of your counsel and your help.”

“You shall have them both, my dear boy,” said he, “you shall have them both to the uttermost. But it seems to me that there is no question at all about the propriety of telling the relatives of the lady all you know. Licinius is probably well acquainted with them; and you could not find any one more proper, or more able for saying whatever is necessary. I am now almost sorry for having prevented your immediate return to the city; and yet this night will soon be over,—we shall get into Rome early to-morrow, and till then

it is probable nothing could have been done, at any rate."

"But Athanasia herself—"

"Ah! that indeed is a point of some difficulty also. It was merely from having remembered who the men were that rode off with you, that I was enabled to learn so soon whither you yourself had been conveyed. But the party consisted of a few men out of almost every one of our cohorts,—those, in short, that were on duty, scattered up and down in different parts of the city; and I may not find it very easy to discover who had the care of any other individual."

"But Athanasia—"

"True," said he, "I had not thought of it. There was but one female besides herself, I think, in the whole party. That will furnish a clew. You may rely on it, I shall easily find out the place to which they have taken her; but then, where and at what distance that may be, Heaven only knows; for it seemed as if every prisoner was to be carried to a separate place of confinement. It is very likely the girl may be lying in some other watch-tower along the coast here, just as you yourself were. These are generally built in sequestered situations; and therefore I think it highly probable the whole assembly may have been dispersed among them. At all events, even if we knew where she is, we could do nothing at present. Come, cheer up, now you have unburdened yourself of all this load. Come, now, do cheer up as well as you can, and I promise you I shall be ready to start as early as ever you please in the morning."

"I will, I will," said I; "I will do every thing I can to prevent any gloom from being thrown over your meeting with your own family."

"Family!" said he; "alas! you speak as if there were a whole houseful of them, when in truth there is no one besides my old father and mother, who are now left to recline by themselves at a board which I remember to have seen surrounded with as blithe a group as ever man had pleasure in looking on. Now all are dead save one, and he must live almost always at a dis-

tance. Alas ! how little for the sake of themselves is it that kind parents rear children. The house that is full of the noise of mirth while they are young is gradually deserted by them as they grow up, until at length, when there is most need of comfort, no comfort is at hand. As for me, I have no opportunity of doing otherwise than I do. I make a run from Rome (when I am there) as often as I am able ; but now it is long, as I told you, since I was last with them, and therefore I can scarcely expect to see them now without observing some change."

"Come," said I, "you almost make it appear necessary for me to take up the part of a comforter in my turn. I perceive it is the listening to my story that has saddened you, and now you are looking upon all things with a heavy eye."

"Nay, nay," quoth he, "I shall not permit you to say that of me neither. Behold yon tall pine, that rises over these houses from among all the other trees that are about them,—that is the tree, my dear Valerius, beneath which I sported when I was a child ; and nobody shall say that I am sorry to see it again. It grows hard-by my father's house, and throws its shade upon the place where the old man has his favourite seat. We shall soon pass through the village, and our house is only a very little way beyond it."

By this time the moon was in her full splendour, and nothing could be more beautiful than the scenery of the native place of Sabinus, as we drew near to its precincts. A little gentle stream, which kissed the path along which we were riding, did not desert us as we entered the village, but murmured all through its humble street. Street, indeed, I should not say,—for there were dwelling-houses on the one side only, the other being occupied with nothing but gardens, in the most of which I saw the Doric portico of a small marble temple, whose white pillars were reflected along with the surrounding poplars, upon the quiet surface of the grassy-margined rivulet. In front of the temple a low bridge of one arch crossed the stream, and there we were met by a troop of young maidens, who seemed to be moving towards the sacred place with some purpose of devotion, for they

were singing as they went, in alternate measures, a hymn to Venus, the goddess of the shrine; and in their hands they carried the garlands of white roses, as if for some votive celebration. Some of the damsels recognised Sabinus as they passed us, and, without interrupting their chant, saluted him kindly with their laughing eyes. We halted our horses, and saw them proceed all together into the sacred enclosure, which they did, not by means of the bridge, although they were close by it, but by wading hand in hand through the stream below—whose pebbles, as it appeared from the evenness of their motion, dared not to offer any violence to the delicate feet that trod upon them.

"Happy creatures!" said I to the centurion; "of a surety they think these moonbeams shine on nothing but glad faces like their own. Alas! with what heart does poor Athanasia at this moment contemplate this lovely heaven!"

"Nay, Valerius," quoth he, "if people were not to be contented with their own share of sorrow, would the world, think ye, be worth living in? I hope Athanasia herself will ere long sing again by the moonlight. But stop, here is my own old haunt, the abode of our village barber; and now I think of it, perhaps it might be as well that you and Dromo should remain here for a moment, till I ride on to the house, and let them know you are coming, for the sudden sight of strange faces might alarm the old folks at this hour."

He had scarcely said so, when the tonsor himself, hearing, I suppose, the sound of our horses' feet, ran out with his razor and basin in his hand, to see what might be the matter.

"Ah, Virro, my good Virro," quoth the centurion, "with joy do I once more behold your face. Well, the girls still sing, and Virro still shaves; so every thing, without question, goes well in the old place."

"The centurion himself!" replies the barber; "so Venus smile upon me, it is the good centurion Kæso Sabinus, who I began to think would never come back again. Here, boy, bring out a cup of the best; for though I see he is bound for home, the centurion shall not pass

my door without wetting his lips. Alight, I pray you : well, I see you won't do that ; but, at least, you shall kiss the rim of the goblet."

"I will," said he, "I promise you, my good friend, and that in a minute or two ; but I must first salute my father ; and in the mean time I leave with you in pledge, good Virro, my excellent friend here, and the most knowing Cretan that ever landed at Brundusium. Dismount, Valerius ; I shall be with you again ere Virro can half smoothen the chin of Dromo, which even this morning showed no small need of trimming."

"Well, well," said the tonsor, "eagles will have their own way wherever they go. Be speedy, and return to us."

The centurion in the mean time had set the spur to his charger ; and we, in obedience to his command, submitted ourselves to the guidance of the oily-faced little barber. A stripling was already holding two horses at the door, but another came out and took care of our animals, and we entered, exchanging courteous salutations, the tonsorial penetralia.

CHAPTER IV.

THEY were occupied by as various and talkative a company as the imagination of Lucilius ever assembled in such a place. In the middle of the room, which was spacious, though low-roofed, hung a large shield of brass, with a dozen mouths of flame blazing around the edge of its circumference, close beside which sat a man with a napkin tucked about his neck, the one side of whose visage, still besmeared with a thick coat of lather, testified that the curiosity of Virro had induced him to abandon a yet uncompleted job. The half-trimmed physiognomy, however, displayed no sign of impatience, and the barber himself seemed not to think any apology necessary, for he resumed his operations with an air of

great cheerfulness, saying, "Neighbours all, neighbours all, here is Kæso Sabinus, that is now the centurion, come once more to gladden the old village with his merry face, and that, I promise you, is prettily tanned since we knew him first."

This piece of news appeared not a little to interest several of those who were sitting under the tonsor's roof.

"Ha!" said one, "the jolly centurion! well, has he brought home a wife with him at last? for the talk was that he had been seen at the amphitheatre, paying great court to one of the richest ladies in Rome, and one of the prettiest withal."

"A wife!" quoth the barber; "I believe you shall as soon see myself bring home a wife as the centurion. No, no; your gay centurions and barbers can do very well without wives. But if he is to have one, I shall be happy to hear she is rich; for centurions, after all, sometimes carry most of their silver upon their helmets, as we do most of our brass on our basins; ha! ha! what say you, young master, are we simple villagers to believe what is reported?"

"Indeed," said I, "I never heard of it before."

"There, now," quoth he, "and if you did you would not say so. Well, I like to see a man keep a secret."

Almost all that were present joined in a cordial roar of laughter when they heard him say this; but he, nothing daunted, dismissed the person whose beard he had now entirely scraped off, and motioning to Dromo to occupy the abdicated place, proceeded, with the most enviable coolness, to whitewash the bristly Cretan in his turn.

"The centurion," resumes he, "has been a long while absent. Well, to see how some people get on in the world! but I wish many others deserved their good luck as well as the centurion."

"Yes," quoth another, "they say he is high in favour with Cesar, and that he has a very fair chance of being a tribune at least before he dies. Well, I am glad on't, for the sake of his old father."

"And I, for the sake of his mother," cries an old woman, who was serving some of the company with a cup

of wine ; " a blithe heart will hers be when she sees him in all his bravery. It was always a pretty youth,—there was never a merrier lad about a village than Kæso Sabinus, no, nor a kinder, neither ; many is the time and oft he has taken my pitcher off my head, and carried it all the way across the road for me."

" If it please you, friend," said another of them (turning to the old dame), " is this the same Sabinus that has lately been in Britain ?"

" Britain !" quoth the dame ; " I never heard that name before—Britain ! I know it not ; I know not where he hath been, but they told me it was over the sea, perhaps in Palestine."

" Tut, dame," interrupted the barber, " you think every one goes to Palestine, because your own boy carried a spear with Titus ; but you know they ruined the city, and killed all the Jews and Christians, and there is no occasion for sending centurions thither now."

" Killed all the Jews and Christians, said you ?" quoth another. " I think the old dame has the better of you as to that point at least, Virro. By Jove, I don't believe Trajan himself will ever be able to kill them all ; their cursed superstition breeds like a rabbit, or spreads like a pestilence. It was but last night that a hundred of them were taken together in one place, eating human flesh."

" Human flesh !" quoth the barber. " Oh, ye gods, why do ye endure such barbarians !"

" Human flesh !" echoed Dromo, springing from his seat ; and I looked at him, and saw that the barber in his horror had made in truth a deep incision upon the cheek of the poor man. The blood, oozing from the cut, had already traced a river of crimson upon the snowy surface of his well soaped chin. It was this that had deranged the philosophic composure and customary phlegm of my Cretan ; and no wonder ; but the enthusiastic tonsor took no notice of what occurred.

" Great Jove !" he proceeded, and he pointed to the roof with his razor as he spoke—" great Jove ! I adjure thee ! are all thy lightnings spent ! is there never a thunderbolt remaining !"

" In the mean time," quoth one of the bystanders,

"they are in the hand, not of Jove, but of Trajan, and he, I think, cannot now be accused of treating these wretches with too much lenity. You have all heard of the death of Thraso."

"We have, we have," cried another; "but what was a single individual to this great assembly? what a sight will it be the day they are all executed!"

"I think," said another (and it was the same person who had inquired whether our centurion were that very Sabinus that had been absent in Britain), "I think you are overrating the numbers of that assembly. It is enough as it is, but they have swelled the matter grievously, in bringing the intelligence of it even to this little distance. I heard of no more than a dozen."

The man who said this was sitting in a corner by himself, as if he had no acquaintance in the room except indeed a single youth, who, I thought, I knew not why, must needs be his freedman; but I suppose I had observed some trivial symptom of service, or of more than the mere obeisance of equal courtesy. The stranger (for such he seemed) had probably taken that day a considerable journey, for his tunic and boots were covered with thick dust, and the hair on his head had much semblance of disorder. He was attired in the plainest manner possible, but, notwithstanding, there was something about him which gave one the idea of rank superior to that of the company in which he was seated; and his complexion was so exceedingly dark, that I could not help thinking to myself—"Well, I am not the only provincial in the room, however; here is certainly some noble African or Asiatic." Whoever he was, he seemed not to covet observation, for I perceived that he took notice when my eye rested upon him, and that he shifted his position, as if to throw his countenance more into the shade.

This man had a cup of wine and a bunch of grapes before him, and indeed few of the company were less comfortably provided; for it was sufficiently apparent that Virro was the tavern-keeper as well as the barber of the village. I had little doubt that the horses I had seen at

the door were those of him and his companion, and that the riders were now refreshing themselves for the pursuance of their journey.

"You have not told me, however," said he, after a pause, "whether or not this be the same Sabinus that was lately in Britain."

"Sir," said I, hearing him repeat the inquiry, "it is the same; I myself came in the same ship with him from Britain, but a few days ago: he is a centurion in the Prætorian bands."

"Yes," replied the stranger, "I guessed in truth it must be the same; for I remember no other of that rank bearing the same name."

"If you are acquainted with him," said I, "you may have an opportunity of seeing him immediately, for I expect him here every moment to take me to his father's villa along with him."

"Well," quoth the barber, who by this time had ended, without further misadventure, the trimming of the Cretan, "well, I hope he will stay for a moment when he does come, and then we shall be sure to hear the truth as to this story about the Christian assembly. They may talk as they please, but may Jove devote me, if I had Trajan's ring upon my finger for one night, I would take good care this should be the last of them."

"And how, friend," said the stranger who had spoken before, "by what means, if I may ask you, should you propose so speedily to do away with this fast-spreading abomination?"

"By Jove," quoth he, "I'll tell you how I should do. I would place myself thus in my tribunal"—(he took his seat at a little table, beside a goblet of wine, as he spoke)—"I would seat myself thus in the midst of a field, as Cato and the great censors of old used to do. I would cause Rome to be emptied—man, woman, and child should pass before me; and every one that did not acknowledge the gods as he passed, by all the gods, he should be strung upon a tree, in presence of all the people. What avails watching, and prying, and spying, and surprising? I should make a shorter work of it, I

throw. By Jove, I think I should show you what it is to deal in the old root-and-branch fashion, for once. I would let all the world see that I can let blood."

"I'll be bound you would," quoth Dromo, rubbing his chin; "and I hope the world would thank you for your pains."

"Come, come, jolly boy," quoth the tonsor, "there is a salve for every sore. Here is a cup of such wine as the emperor himself would not disdain to moisten his lips withal. Taste—drink—forget the cut, and sit more steady the next time you hear such a story. May Hermes be my guide, good friends, if he did not shake as much under my hands as if the Christians had attempted to make a meal of himself; and if they had done so, would they not have had a savoury banquet? Ha! ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" re-echoed half the company, and Dromo was fain to accept of the cup that was offered him, instead of attempting to make any further impression on the jocular barber. But before he had seen the foundation of it, Sabinus himself re-appeared at the door, and summoned us to go with him. The guests of Virro, however, prevailed on him to enter for a moment, and the centurion having taken his seat in the midst of the company, their conversation was resumed.

"You may say what you will of them," quoth one of the company, who I think had not before spoken since our entrance, "you may say what you please about them, but I believe I have seen a little more of them than any one among you all, and I cannot bring myself to believe every thing I hear said concerning their superstition. I neither know, nor desire to know, what their faith is; but, by Jupiter, in point of practice I have known some of them behave so as might shame the best of ourselves; and I shall make bold to say, that if their religion does not create goodness, it at least does not always extinguish it."

"Ay, master goldsmith," quoth the barber, "you were always fond of having an opinion of your own; and, pray, what is it that you have had occasion to know

about the Christians, more than the rest of us who hear you? If you mean that you have seen some of them die bravely in the amphitheatre, why, that we have all heard of at least, and I think nobody disputes it."

"No, master barber," replied he, "that is not what I was thinking of; for, by Jove, whoever has lived in Rome as much as I have done, must be pretty well convinced that a bold death is no evidence of an innocent life. Why, I have seen your common thief-knave, when he knew he could do no better, brace you his nerves for the extremity, and die like a very Hercules. He must be a pitiful fellow, indeed, that would shame himself in the eyes of a whole city. If it were wished that wretches should expire like themselves, I take it, the best way would be to make them expire by themselves. No, that was not what I was thinking of. By Jove, I would rather judge of a man by his living than his dying—ay, or of a woman either."

"True, true; 'tis all true you say," rejoins Virro; "and pray, what have you got to tell us about the life, then, of all the Christians?"

"Not much," said he; "not much, master barber. Only, if they were all like one that I know, I should not be ashamed to commend them—ay, if it were before the face of the emperor himself. But you shall hear. My old mother (peace to her manes), was passing the Salarian one day last year, and there came by a hot-headed young spark, driving four abreast in a chariot as fiercely as if he had been a second Nero in the Circus. He called out, that I believe; but the dame was deaf, and whether he tried to pull up or no, I know not, but over she went, and one of the horses trod upon her old limbs as she fell. Another of the same sort came close behind, and I have been told they were running a race; but however that might be, on they both passed like a whirlwind, and my poor mother was left by herself among the flying dust. But the gods had mercy on her, they sent a kind heart to her aid; and, by all Olympus, it beats in the breast of a Christian."

"So the Christian took up your old mother and was kind to her, friend Marcus?"

"Kind!—why, she was carried into one of the stateliest, grandest villas on that side of Tiber, and tended for six weeks by a noble lady, as if she had been, not my mother, but her own; and this lady, friends—by Jove, I suspected it not for long after—this lady was a Christian; but I shall not say how I found it out, nor would I mention the thing at all but among honest men and good friends. She is a Christian, that is certain. I would give more gold than I ever showed in my booth at the Saturnalia, rather than hear she was one of those whom the Prætorians seized last night. But I shall hear, when I return to the city, both where they were taken and who they were."

"Where they were taken!" said the stranger, whose appearance I described a little while ago; "I can tell you well enough where they were taken, my good man; it was not far from the Appian Way, within one of the old monuments there,—the monument, it is said, of one of the noble branches of the Sempronii."

"Of the Sempronii?" said the goldsmith. "Phœbus, Apollo, shield us!" and I think his colour changed as suddenly as ever it did in the cheek of a damsel, and from that moment he became as silent as hitherto he had been communicative.

The rest of the company were as quiet as he for some little space. The swarthy stranger, the silence yet continuing, arose from his seat, laid a piece of money upon the table, and moved towards the door, as if to take his departure. The barber also rose up as if to assist him in mounting, but he said to him, "Sit still, I pray you, my friend;" at the same time beckoning with his finger to the goldsmith, who, with a very dejected countenance, followed him into the street of the village. What passed between them there we perceived not; but the artificer re-entered not the chamber till some moments after we had heard the departing tread of the stranger's horses. When he did come in again, he had the appearance of being in great confusion, and drank off the cup of wine which stood before Sabinus, in a way that showed him quite unaware of what he was

doing. Shortly after he also took his departure, and we ourselves, bidding adieu to the jovial tonsor, walked slowly towards the paternal mansion of the centurion.

CHAPTER V.

AND we very soon reached it ; for, as I have already said, it was situated but a little way out from the village. Some thick and tall hedges of beech intervened between it and the public way, which then at last took a direction different from that of the stream along whose banks we had been riding, leaving its cool waters to glide away towards the left among the green meadows and peaceful groves of the ancient Sabinus. Close to the house itself flourished, among other trees, the sad cypress—the only one the proprietor was at last to take with him. The dwelling itself was modest and low-roofed, having no external ornament but a single portico, with a few statues ranged between its pillars. We entered by this portico, and found the feeble old man sitting by himself (for his wife had already retired to her own chamber), in an apartment immediately adjacent, wherein the beams of the moon, having partial access, were mingled with the almost equally soft and subdued light of a painted lamp suspended from the ceiling. The father of my friend had all the appearance of being sinking apace beneath the progressive influence of the most hopeless of maladies—old age ; yet he received me with an air, not of cheerfulness, but of kindness. The evening breeze, which found admission to his couch through the open pillars of the porch, he seemed to be inhaling eagerly, while his countenance exhibited in its wan and faint lines the pleasure with which its coolness affected him. Beside him were placed baskets of fragrant roses, gathered from the abundance of his gar-

dens. The young Vernæ,* who from time to time brought in these newly pulled flowers, came into the chamber with a decent appearance of sobriety and concern; but they were never long gone before we could hear them laughing and shouting again at their play. "Poor children!" quoth the old man, observing that his son heard the noise with some displeasure; "check not the poor children in their mirth, Kæso;—why should they trouble themselves with thinking of the not remote victim of Orcus?"

To which the centurion replied, somewhat softening as he spoke that loud and cheerful tone with which he was accustomed to address all persons, "Courage, my dear father, you must not speak so of yourself. Cerberus, I perceive, has only been making an ineffectual snap at you, and you will be growing younger again after all this."

At which the old man shook his head, without any external sign of emotion, and replied, in a low monotonous voice, "Younger in the wrong way, my boy; for I become every day smaller in body, and feebler, and less able to do any thing to help myself. Nor am I unconscious that I have seen my due proportion of time. And yet, O fast sliding gentle brook, which I see between these paternal trees, I am still loath to exchange thee for Styx, and to lose the cheerful and sacred light of the sun and moon. I wish only I were once more able to repair with thy stream to the banks of Father Tiber, that I might salute the good emperor, who has been so kind to my son, and who would treat even an old broken-down and long-retired soldier, like myself, with more favour than is to be expected from Rhadamanthus. Trajan lives (long may he live) and is in vigour, and may carry whither he will his eagles, which never droop their wings; but I—an old man and a feeble—feel full surely that it is the lot of human nature to tend downwards at last. As clouds let down their drops, so the many-peopled earth lets fall dismissed ghosts upon the Stygian shore."

While he was saying this, and other things in the

* Children of domestic slaves.

same strain, an ancient Egyptian slave, who seemed to have the chief management of every thing about the house, came into the chamber, and after desiring some of the boys to bring forth refreshments, took his place on a low stool by the foot of his master's couch, yet with the air of one accustomed to share both in the meals and the conversation of the family. "Come, Tarna," said the centurion to him as he sat down, "what has become of all your boasted philosophy? Why is it that you do not take care to inspire our old friend with notions of less gloominess? Why is it that you do not bring out for his use some of those old stores with which, when I was young, you were more willing to treat my ears than they were to attend to them?"

"Nay, I know not how it is," said the old man, before the Egyptian could make any answer,—“nay, nay, I liked very well to listen to Tarna's fine theories when I was able to walk about the fields, and to take my evening cup beneath the shadow of the old pine upon the green; but now I would rather have him be silent, for he fills me only with troublesome thoughts, which task my mind to wrestle with them, and which always end in discomposing my serenity. He is a philosopher,” continued he, turning to me; “and you must know he is one of those they call the Epicureans. But whatever others may say, I think their doctrines are all either fantastic and unprofitable, or infidel and wicked. Do not trouble me any more, dear Tarna, with any of your speeches. Keep your mind to yourself. Allow me to believe as all my fathers did, and to contemplate, not only the same sepulchre in which their urns are placed, but the same dim regions in which all their shades are now expecting the greeting of another descendant.”

“Nay, sir,” then said the Egyptian, addressing himself to me, “my good master may say whatever else he pleases against my doctrines, but I am sure they appear to me to be as tranquillizing against death as all men must admit they are in themselves grand to contemplate. To me it seems, that by the rushing shower of atoms which moves everywhere through space, the mind is soothed and soothed, as by the sound of a great river

carrying continually the watery offspring of the mountains into the bosom of the wide ocean."

"Nilus—Nilus, for example," interrupted the smiling centurion.

"Even so, if it please you," continued the philosophic slave, "even let it be believed that my mind cannot easily divest itself of the image of that king of rivers, with the magnificence of which my eyes in infancy and happy youth were familiar. The mind, sirs, appears to me to be soothed by the contemplation of infinity, even as the ear of an Egyptian sleeper is calmed by the eternal music of the rolling Nilus. It mingles itself with that which it contemplates; it perceives—it feels itself to be a liquid part of that great and endless stream of universal being—a part which has been casually arrested and detained, but which will soon mingle again and be scattered away in a thousand fragments, to wander no one knows whither through the great all-receiving void—not to lose existence, for in that my dear master entirely misunderstands me—but to cease from feeling as a Valerius, a Sabinus, or a Tarna."

During all this the old man kept regarding his Egyptian with a placid smile, shaking his head, however, every now and then, in token of his incredulity. But I said to the philosophic slave, for it was to me in truth he appeared to be chiefly addressing himself,—

"What is this you have said? Do you assert that I can cease to be Valerius, to feel as Valerius, and yet not lose my existence? Can I *be*, and yet not be *myself*?"

"Most easily," replied he, "most easily. The divided fragments may move about for a thousand years, before it befall any of them to be stopped in some future combination of atoms. These, it is manifest, only tremble and suffer when they form part of a soul, but are immediately released from all pain or mischance when this confinement and cohesion are at an end, and they being dispersed regain liberty and wander about singly, as of yore; for, as our great dispeller of delusions says, 'When death is, we are not.' If, therefore, Sabinus shrinks from the fear of death, it is an idle fear. Does he not perceive that when death arrives, Sabinus is no

longer to be found? Whatever its effects may be, they must affect, not him, but an army of innumerable disjointed essences, in no one of which could he by any means be able to recognise himself."

"To make a very short story out of a very long one," interrupted the centurion, "you don't think life is worthy of the name of existence; that being so, it is no wonder you should think lightly of death."

"Mistake me not," quoth the sage, "you do me great wrong if you take me for the entertainer of such loose notions as these. No, no; life is existence; I not only admit that, but I assert that it is the business of every man, and the sole true object of human wisdom, to render life while it endures as pleasant as is possible. Though the atoms be fortuitously, and not permanently, united, there is no reason why, while their union lasts, they should not have their corners smoothed off, and lie as comfortably together as is possible. Earthly pleasure consists in a bland juxtaposition of atoms necessarily, though temporarily, connected; the removal of pain implies the presence of that calm quiescence which pervades the nobleness of the unenclosed ALL. To exist in this shape we are compelled; it is our business to render our existence as near an approach to felicity as we may."

"Fill your cup, good Tarna," quoth the centurion; "I am no great philosopher, yet methinks I can see the drift of this part of your story. Fill up your goblet, most venerable Epicurean, and see (if it be not below your dignity) whether the atoms which, by a fortuitous and temporary juxtaposition, have formed your throat, will not feel their corners very philosophically softened by the rushing of a little rivulet of good Falernian—one cup of which, saving your presence, I hold to be more worthy of wetting my guttural atoms, than all the water that ever sported its music between Memphis and Alexandria."

While the slave and the centurion were thus discoursing, I wish you had been present, that you might have seen with what delight the old man listened to the words that his son uttered. Propped up among the cushions, and scarcely sufficiently master of his trembling hand to be

able to lift the cup to his mouth, he appeared to taste, as it were, the pleasure of a renovated existence, in contemplating the brown health and strong muscular fabric of the inheritor of his name. The hearty masculine laugh with which my friend usually concluded his observations was, I take leave to think, richer music to his ears than ever Egyptian heard in the dark rollings of the Nile, or Epicurean dreamt of in the airy dance of atoms. I suspect he was more reconciled to the inevitable stroke of fate by considering that he was to leave such a representative behind him, than by any argument which either his own superstition or the philosophy of his attendant could suggest to him. In return for the obvious admiration of his sire, the centurion, without question, manifested every symptom of genuine affection. Yet, I think, the instinctive consciousness of his own strength made the piety of the robust son assume an air more approaching to that of patronage than might have been altogether becoming. If such a fault there was, however, it was quite plain that it escaped the notice of the old man himself, who continued, till Tarna insisted upon his retiring to bed, to gaze upon my friend, and listen to his remarks, with looks of exultation ineffable.

The centurion retired with his father, that he might take farewell of his parents both together, in their private chamber; so that I was left alone with Tarna for some time, and it was then that, in my juvenile simplicity, I could not help expressing my surprise at finding, in a servile condition, a man possessed of such acquirements as his, and addicted to such pursuits.

"It would argue little," he replied, "in favour either of the pursuits or the acquirements you are pleased to talk of with so much respect, if they tended only to make me repine at the place which has been allotted me—it is no matter whether by the decrees of fate or the caprices of fortune. And after all, I am not of opinion that any such external circumstances can much affect the real happiness of any one. Give to him who has been born a slave what men are pleased to call his freedom; in a few weeks he will become so much accus-

tomed to the boon, that he will cease to think of it. Heap wealth upon him ; to wealth also he will gradually become habituated. Rank—power ; with all it is the same. It is in the mind only that the seat of happiness is placed ; and there it never can be, unless in companionship with thoughts that look down upon and despise being affected by trifling things.”

“And are such,” said I, “the views of all those who follow your sect ?”

“I wish it were so,” he replied ; “but ere you remain long in the city, you will perceive well that it is quite the reverse. There you will meet with not a few, philosophers only in the name, who, having small means of subsistence, but being desirous of leading a luxurious and agreeable life, become teachers of such doctrines as may accord best with the vicious inclinations of those who are most likely to entertain them. These persons assume and disgrace too often the name of Epicureans. They are seen everywhere at feasts, crowned with myrtle, and fawning upon gouty senators ; and whenever a boar’s head appears, they are sure to call it worthy of Meleager for its size. Their conversation is made up of stale jests about Charon and his boat, and the taking of auguries ; and, when finally inebriated, they roll upon the ground like those animals to whom, in consequence of the proceedings of such hypocritical pretenders, the ignorant have dared too often to liken the wisest of mankind. Such things I disdain ; I am satisfied to remain, as I was born, in the rank of *Æsop*, *Terence*, and *Epictetus*.”

By this time the centurion had returned. He had a lamp in his hand ; and he interrupted our conversation by saying to me, “Come, we start betimes, *Valerius* ; therefore we must to bed forthwith, and you, too,” said he, turning his jocular eye on the slave, “you too, my sweet cock of *Cyrene* ; you have already done enough for one night. I think you had better fold your wings, and compose yourself upon your roost. By *Jove* !” he continued, as we were passing to our apartments, “what with *Christians* on one side, and *philosophers* on the other, a man cannot go to bed in these times without

having his brain perplexed as much as if he were housed in the Labyrinth."

"The Labyrinth of Crete, do you mean?" quoth Dromo, who was ready waiting for me in the room where I was to sleep.

"Peace, you well-trimmed knave," replied the centurion, chucking him under the chin; "I suppose you think that, because you are a Cretan, there is never a labyrinth in the world to which you could not furnish a clew."

So saying, he stepped into a room immediately adjoining, and in a very few minutes I knew, from the heaviness of his breathing, that he was fast asleep.

"Oh, enviable temperament!" said I to myself; "you likened the slave to a bird. Methinks yourself are more deserving of the simile. The light and the air of heaven are sufficient to make you happy—your wings are ever strong—their flight ever easy—and the rain of affliction glides off them as soon as it falls. Sleep on, kind heart. It is only the troubles of a friend that can ever disturb your serenity."

I had undressed, and was in bed before Dromo interrupted my reflections by saying, in a tone of considerable confidence, "And now, Master Valerius, do you still continue, as much as two days ago, to disbelieve in filters, and despise enchantresses? You see what, with all my precaution, has come of this connection between Rubellia and the Neapolitan."

"In truth, Dromo," I replied, "it is visible that Pona had some share in leading the soldiers to the Christian assembly; but I am doubtful if that had any thing to do with the private affairs of the Lady Rubellia. As to that matter, I confess myself entirely in the dark."

"Dark indeed," quoth he, "must your observation have been, if you have yet to learn that, but for that accursed witch, nothing of all this had befallen; but if there be an edict against the Christians, there are twenty laws against enchantresses; and that both Pona and she that consulted her shall know well ere long, if they do not as yet know it; or may Cretan change places with Boeotian, and be ever henceforth a by-word for stupidity."

"Say on, good Dromo," I replied, "I am all ears; and as you appear to have been all eyes, I shall probably soon be more enlightened."

"Well," quoth he, "I am glad to find that you are in a mood to listen to me decently; for may Cretan Jove devote me, if ever I saw a pretty young gentleman, with nothing but a few insignificant mischances behind him, and all the fair world before him, carry himself after such a melancholy hang-head guise as you have done ever since we delivered you from your tower. Sextus said, when he sent me with the centurion, that he was sure you would be in need of much comforting; but, poor lad, I trow he did not suspect he had so much reason for saying so."

"But what as to Rubellia? Go on with your story, good Dromo."

"Well, well; you remember," said he, "where I took my station when you mounted those unfortunate steps upon the tower. I had not stood there many minutes, I think, before I heard somebody approaching on the side towards the city; and having no doubt it was Rubellia herself, I was busy preparing myself for giving her such a salutation as I thought would put a speedy end to her wandering for that night, at all events. On came the steps, but no Rubellia. No; you will start when you hear me say so—it was nobody but Xerophastes himself; and although he had laid aside the Greek mantle, and donned a boatman's black cloak for the nonce, I promise you I knew his stately gait well enough beneath all these new trappings. It was no part of my job, however, to attempt frightening the stoic, though that too, I think, might not, after all, have been so very difficult; for I swear to you he whistled as he went; and it is a sure sign, my master, a man's pulse beats not so calmly as it ought to do, when you hear him whistling among tombs in the moonlight, more especially when he has a private errand in his breast with him."

"And so you let him pass without doing any thing?"

"I did; I confess that I gave one or two groans, after he had gone on a few paces, but I did not observe him

much quicken his walk, and I believe, to do the man justice, he set it all down to the wind rustling among the trees. But I thought not much of him at all, to speak the truth ; for, said I to myself, ' Well, if it be as I have suspected for these two blessed days, and this master long-beard is really in league with the widow, the chances are, she herself is not far behind him.' I lay by, therefore, and expected in silence till I should hear another tread ; and in the mean time I spoke to you once or twice across the road, but you made me no answer, for which you know your own reasons."

"The reason," said I, "was a very simple one, I assure you. I had fallen asleep ; and no wonder, for you know how long I had been a watcher."

"Well," said he, "to say truth, I guessed as much, and it was nothing but the born tenderness of my disposition which made me cease from offering you any disturbance. I thought to myself I should surely be enough single-handed for the widow ; and besides, in case of need, I knew your waking would always be in my power."

"Admirably reasoned, Dromo," said I ; "and so it seems no need came, for you certainly never awakened me ; for which I may thank the bonds from which the centurion's kindness has just set me free. But you have atoned abundantly—I pray you get on with your tale."

"Presently," he resumed, "I heard footsteps, indeed, my good master ; and not footsteps alone, but voices, and not human voices alone neither, but the growling of those abominable dogs, with which I think both of us became better acquainted that night than we could have wished. Afraid of those foul creatures, I moved from the place as hastily as I could, till I came to a tree, the branches of which, springing low on the trunk, offered an opportunity for mounting, which I should have been a Bœotian indeed had I neglected. I mounted, and hiding myself as well as I could among the boughs, awaited the arrival of the party, which consisted—ay, stare if you will—of Xerophrastes and the widow, walking in front, in earnest talk by themselves, and the

Neapolitan witch in the rear, calming, as well as she could with her odious caresses, the hoarse throats of her brutal attendants. They halted just between the tree I had left and that which I had ascended, and though they spoke low enough, I promise you I could hear them distinctly."

"And what, in the name of Heaven, said they?"

"'Are you sure,' said the widow, 'that this is indeed the girl whom Sextus went to see at the villa of Capito? Are you certain of it? Will you swear it is this same Athanasia? Can there be no mistake?'

"'Mistake, lady, there is none,' replied the stoic. 'Pona was at the villa with her basket the very day Sextus went thither, and she saw them all walking together in the garden.'

"'I did so, indeed, noble lady,' interrupted the witch, who by this time had come close up to them as they were halting; 'I did indeed see them; and I swear to you, she is a beautiful creature, though not to be talked of in the same year with my noble lady.'

"'And this little Christian,' said the lady, as if to herself, 'it is she that has cost me all this trouble! It is for her that I have been insulted as never woman was by man: and they are both here in the tower, Pona?' said she. 'You are sure Sextus and this Athanasia are both together in the tower?'

"'They are, lady,' quoth the witch; 'they are both in the tower, for I saw the lady go in by herself first, and then in went some dozen of those muffled blasphemers, and last of all went in he himself. I saw him not enter indeed, but I swear to you that I saw him here not twenty paces from hence, and he had with him that cunning slave of his' (meaning myself, sir), 'whose ugly face' (the foul woman added) 'I would know although it were disguised beneath all the washes that were ever mixed in the seething-pots of Calabria. I saw them here; they threw stones at these dogs while they were crouching at my feet; I myself was fain to escape from them, but I promise my noble lady I have already taken measures for abundant blessed revenge; and if she will let me say so, for my most noble lady—'

“‘But what,’ interrupted our long-beard, ‘what will Licinius say? At least, my lady and my friend Pona will take good care that no suspicion of having had any hand in all this ever rests upon me? Sextus is a silly boy, without taste, judgment, or discretion; but Licinius is acute and powerful, and a poor rhetorician cannot stand against Licinius.’

“‘Fear not,’ said Rubellia; ‘fear not, dear Xerophrates. Nobody shall appear in the matter except Pona, and as she tells you she has already given warning at the Capene Gate, the watch will be here on the instant. Be sure there are always a hundred men stationed on the Cœlian. Nothing can save them, unless we interfere in their behalf; and to that length, I think, it can scarcely be supposed we should carry our forbearance.’

“These words were scarcely out of her mouth, ere the soldiers, in good truth, were heard approaching; although they advanced, indeed, as quietly as possible, that the Christians might not have warning to disperse themselves, Xerophrates, on hearing them, ascended with great agility a tree just over-against mine, on the other side of the road. Rubellia retreated among the pines, and Pona alone, with her dogs; awaited the arrival of the guard. I, in the mean time, would have perilled a limb, I think, to be able to give you the alarm; but little did I suspect, that had I sought you where I left you, I should have sought for you there in vain. How, I pray you, did you contrive to get into the accursed tower?”

I told him I should give him the story another time at full length, and mentioned briefly the general outline of what had occurred. And then the Cretan proceeded with his narrative.

“I leave you to guess, Valerius, how my heart beat when I saw the witch lead the soldiers straight to the place where I supposed you were still sitting. I leave you to guess with what anxiety I saw the whole tower surrounded—surprised—entered—its secret tenants brought out,—and, above all, with what astonishment I saw you led out, the last of their number.

“I had neither time to think by what means all this

had happened, nor the least power to interfere in your behalf. I saw you all mounted—guarded—borne away. Whither they carried you I was unable to make the smallest conjecture. I saw Sabinus speak to you, and then I had hope,—but that too failed. In brief, I saw all that passed, and did not venture down from my tree till the whole assembly, not forgetting Xerophrastes himself, had departed. Then at last down I came, and you may judge for yourself what a story I had to tell to young Licinius when I reached home.

“To do my dear boy justice, he behaved with as much spirit as might have done credit to any one of double his years. Instead of waiting to ponder and hesitate, as he used to do when his own matters perplexed him, he went from me straight to his father. I followed him, and would have listened to what passed between them; but the thickness of the door prevented me from very well understanding them. Your name, and the name of Athanasia, and the name of your friend the centurion, were almost the only words I could pick up. But before they had done with their conversation, Sabinus himself arrived, and he was immediately taken into the same chamber where they were. Licinius and he went out together soon afterward, and I think they walked towards the Palatine in the Capitol; but whithersoever they went, they had a good deal of work before them, for the day had advanced considerably before they returned. The centurion’s horse was brought to the door shortly after, and my master desired me to accompany him; and they gave me these letters for you at the same time, which I had almost forgotten to deliver.”

Such was the story of the faithful Cretan. The letter of Sextus, which I first opened, contained nothing but expressions of affection, concern for what had befallen me, and anxiety to see me again. That of Licinius I have still preserved, and here it is.

LICINIUS to VALERIUS sends health.

“Since our Sabinus desires that I should write to you, although his own kindness renders it unnecessary that I

should do so, I cannot refuse. I understand little, my Valerius, of what has brought you into this condition, from which, not without difficulty overcome, you are, notwithstanding, speedily to be delivered. I guess that hastiness of various sorts, not, however, entirely without excuse in a person of your age, has been the means of implicating you in the affairs of a sect equally unworthy of your communication, whether you consider the country in which their superstition originated, or the barbarities with which it is stained. But even for beauty, my young friend, it becomes not a Roman, least of all a Valerius, to forget what is due to the laws of Rome, and the will of the prince. Consider with yourself how nearly you have escaped serious evil. Return to us, and forget what has passed, except for the lesson it must teach you. Of Rubellia and Xerophrastes I am unwilling to believe, without further examination, what has been told me by my slave Dromo. We shall speak of that and other matters when (which I hope will be early to-morrow) you once more give us the pleasure of seeing you. I have then much to say. Farewell."

CHAPTER VI.

FROM various interruptions, not necessary to be recited, the next day was already far advanced before the friendly centurion and myself once more drew near to the precincts of the city. When we reached at length the brow of the first declivity beyond the Anio, the sun was just about to sink behind the Janicular, and all the wide surface of the city lay before us bathed in the richness of his farewell beams. The innumerable sounds of the great Capitol, blended together as it were into one mighty whisper, seemed only to form part of the natural music of the air, and, but for some momentary echoes of a louder note, might almost have been confounded by the ear of a traveller with the universal hum of twilight insects, and the twitter of birds among the trees. We paused for a mo-

ment to contemplate the evening splendour of Rome ; and then rode slowly down the hill, at the base of which the path is ever darkened by the broad shadows of the cypress groves and funereal monuments of the Appian Way.

We advanced in silence through that region of melancholy magnificence, the natural effect of which was, as you will easily imagine, not a little deepened on my mind by the strong associations that connected with its scenery the causes of my own internal distresses. I scarcely knew whether I should be able of myself to recognise among so many similar edifices, the mausoleum of the Sempronii, and there was some feeling in my breast that rendered me unwilling to put any questions concerning it to Sabinus. As for Dromo, he, with the centurion's attendant, had fallen considerably behind us : and on the whole, indeed, I am not quite certain whether my curiosity was not crossed and balanced by an equal measure of reluctance. As it was, I rode on in silence, and my companion (although during the day he had talked, if not laughed, as much as usual) seemed to be as quietly disposed as myself.

But while we were moving onward thus slowly and silently, we heard of a sudden a clang of cymbals among the trees, a little to the right-hand ; and the centurion, saying, "What procession can this be?" led the way down a narrow path branching from the main road, which appeared to conduct towards the place from which the sound proceeded. This path was winding and dusky, being edged on either side with pines and cypresses, so that for some space we saw nothing ; and the cymbals having ceased again, the centurion said, "I suppose it is some funeral ; they have probably completed every thing, and have seen out the last gleam among the embers. Let us get on, for perhaps we may be kept back by their procession, if they are already returning."

We quickened our pace accordingly, and held on till at length a sharp turning of the road discovered to us a great number of persons who were standing quite silent, as if in contemplation of some ceremony or other spectacle ; but what it was, owing to the sinking of the ground beyond,

and the intervention of such a crowd of people, we could not see. Several persons on horseback seemed, like ourselves, to have had their progress interrupted; but they were sitting quietly, and making no complaint. The silence of the whole assembly was indeed such that Sabinus motioned to me to ask no questions, adding, in a low whisper, "Take off your riding-cap; it is some religious rite, and you see everybody is uncovered."

The centurion himself, however, was not a person to be stopped thus, without wishing to understand something further of the cause of the interruption; so ere long he began to manifest considerable symptoms of fretfulness. The one side of the road was guarded by a high wall, to the top of which a number of the more juvenile spectators had climbed; the other by a ditch of great breadth, and full of water, beyond which was a grove of trees; and I saw him eying the ditch, as if considering whether, by passing it, it might not be possible, without disturbing the crowd, to get nearer the object of their attention, or at least to make progress in our journey. At last he beckoned to me to follow him, and the bold equestrian at one leap easily passed over the ditch, and all the reeds that bordered it. I imitated the example, and so did the Prætorian soldier, who had now come up to us: but as for Dromo, he was obliged to remain (patiently or impatiently) behind; for, of a truth, the animal he bestrode was in nowise calculated for such feats.

We rode very quickly, therefore, along the margin of the trees, and ere we had reached the bottom of the declivity on which they grew, I perceived plainly that we had come close to the Sempronian monument, and that the ceremony, whatever it might be, was taking place immediately in front of the old tower upon the road. We gave our horses to the soldier, and contrived with some difficulty to gain the bank on the side of the way immediately over-against it—the same place, in fact, where the Cretan slave had taken his station among the pine-trees, on the night when all those things occurred of which I have already spoken to you. Like him, we placed ourselves as quietly as we could behind the trunks of the trees, and indeed, for our purpose, there could have been

no better situation. We were contented, however, to occupy it as much as possible without attracting observation; for it was evident, in spite of the curiosity that detained so great a multitude near at hand, there must be something mysterious or ominous of nature in that which was taking place, since not one of the crowd had dared to come forward so as to be within hearing of the officiators.

And these, indeed, were a very melancholy looking group. For men, and women, and children of every age, to the number it may be of a hundred, appeared all standing together sorrowfully, and in garments of black; while, in the midst of them, and immediately by the base of the monument, two or three veiled priests, with their necessary assistants, seemed to be preparing for sacrifice, a strong black bull, whose hoofs spurned the dust as they held him, and his gilded horns glittered in the light of the declining sun. Sabinus no sooner discovered the arrangement of the solemn company than he suspected what was their occupation; and he whispered to me, while as yet all was silent, "Be sure these are all the kindred of the Sempronii. Without question they have come to purify the mausoleum, and to avert, according to the custom of antiquity, the vengeance of the violated Manes. Behold," said he, "that tall and stately figure, close to the head of the animal on the right-hand; that, I know, is Marcia—yes, Marcia Sempronia—she that is priestess of Apollo the Palatine. Without doubt, these by her are her brothers."

"Some of her near relations they must be," I made answer, also in a whisper; "for observe you that young woman, whose face is wrapped in her mourning veil, and whose sobs are audible even through all its folds? I had one glimpse of her countenance this moment, and I am sure it is the young Sempronia, the cousin and companion of the unfortunate Athanasia,—the daughter of Lucius the senator."

"Poor girl!" replied Sabinus, "from my heart do I pity her. See how she is in agony from thinking of that which hath befallen her friend. They are all joining hands, that the nearest of the kindred touching the priest, his deed may appear manifestly to be the deed of all. The

priestess of Apollo takes hold of the left hand of him that wields the axe, and they are all hand in hand. She, poor soul, alas ! she is ill able to take any part in their service ; and they all appear sufficiently downcast."

At this moment, one of the officiators sounded a few mournful notes upon a trumpet, and its solitary echo thrilled the air. The priest who held the axe clave at one blow the forehead of the blindfold bull. The blood streamed, and wine streamed with it abundantly upon the base of the mausoleum ; and then, while we were yet gazing on the convulsions of the dying animal, the trumpet sounded a second time, and the whole company sang together, the sacrificing priest leading and directing them. Distinct above all, yet low and steadfast rather than loud, I heard the voice of the stately priestess of Apollo ; but as for poor Sempronia, her notes were broken, and her assistance feeble.

The shadows of the tower and of the pine-trees lay strongly upon them, and I thought there was something of a very strange contrast between the company and their chant on the one hand, and the beautiful sculptures, full of all the emblems of life and happiness, on the other, with which, according to the gay dreams of Grecian fancy, the walls of the funereal edifice itself had here and there been garnished. Fauns, and torch-bearing nymphs and children, crowned with garlands, and wreathed groups and fantastic dances, seemed to enliven almost to mockery the monumental marbles ; but one felt the real gloominess both of death and of superstition, in the attitudes and accents of the living worshippers. It was thus they sang :—

Ye Gods infernal ! hear us from the gloom
Of venerable depths, remote, unseen ;
Hear us, ye guardians of the stained tomb,
Majestic Pluto—and thou, Stygian queen,
On the dark bosom leaning of great Dis—
Thou reconciled Star of the Abyss.

Blood, not for you, unholy hands have poured,
Ye heard the shriek of your insulted shrine ;
Barbarian blasphemies and rites abhorr'd
Pollute the place that hath been long divine ;
Borne from its wounded breast, an atheist cry
Hath pierced the upper and the nether sky.

With blood of righteous sacrifice again
 The monumental stone your suppliants lave ;
 Behold the dark-brow'd bull—behold him slain !
 Accept, ye powers of the relenting grave,
 The sable current of that vital stream ;—
 And let the father's hope upon the children gleam.

And ye, that in the ever dusky glades
 Of Hades wandering (by Cocytus' shore),
 Ancestral spirits—melancholy shades—
 With us the trespass of the tomb deplore ;—
 Oh ! intercede—that terror and disgrace
 May not possess (as now) your resting-place.

What though the liquid serpent of the deep
 Between lie coil'd in many a glittering ring !
 Not unobserved of your pale eyes we weep,
 Nor to deaf ears this doleful chant we sing ;
 Strong is the voice of blood through night to go,—
 Through night and hell, and all the realms below.

Then hear us, kindred spirits—stately Sire
 And pensive Mother ! wheresoe'er ye glide ;
 If ever solemn pile and soaring fire
 In freedom sped you to the Stygian tide,—
 Have pity on your children : let the breath
 Of living sorrow melt the frozen ear of death.

For Hæc, that sprung like us from your high line,
 Hath mingled in the sacrifice of guilt,—
 Ye know that ar'ry star, her natal sign,
 To expiate whose curse this blood is spilt ;—
 If not suffices this atoning blood,
 Oh, steep the thought of her in Lethe's flood !

Beneath that current, lazy and serene,
 In whose unfathomable waters lie
 The slumbering forms of horrors that have been
 In Hades, and in Ocean, Earth, and Sky—
 With long forgotten curse and murder old
 Steep that lost daughter's errors manifold.

Once more for you a hallow'd flame there burns,
 Once more for you a hallow'd stream there flows ;
 Despise not our lustrations of your urns,
 Nor let unhoused Manes be our foes !
 Above the children of your lineage born
 Hover not, awful ghosts, in anger and in scorn.

These words were sung, as I have said, by the whole
 of this kindred there assembled together ; the first part of
 them distinctly, though not loudly, but the last verses in a

note so very low that no one, unless quite near (like ourselves) could possibly have comprehended any thing of their meaning. But as for the young Sempronia, when they came to that part of the chant in which reference was so particularly made to Athanasia, not only did her lips refuse to join in the words, but her agitation was such, that I thought the poor maiden would have screamed outright, had she not been controlled by the eye, and the hand also, of her aunt the priestess. Sobs, however, and low hysterical groans could not be stifled; and at last so great was her agony, that even the haughty priestess was compelled to give way to it.

"Bring water," said she; "dash ye water upon the foolish thing; methinks it seems almost as if she had partaken in the phrensy of her unhappy—"

And before she could finish the sentence, one or two of the females that were present did take hold of Sempronia, and began, seeing there was no water nearer at hand, to bear her slender form towards the small stream of which I have already spoken, and which flowed immediately behind the clump of pine-trees among which the centurion and I were standing.

She was quite passive in their hands; and they dragged her without resistance or difficulty to the place where we were standing; but they could not pass without seeing us: and no sooner did the eyes of Sempronia fall upon me than she burst, by one unexpected effort, from the arms of those who were sustaining her, and, ere I or any one could suspect what she was to do, there lay she at my feet, clinging with her arms around my knees, and looking up to me (astonished) with a face of such anguish as never before, nor I think since, did I see portrayed in any human lineaments. The tresses of her hair, which, in her struggle, had altogether unbound themselves, hung around her neck and lay upon her shoulders in dark masses, that, heaving with the heaving of her bosom, seemed of themselves to be instinct with the elements of life and agony. Her beautiful features were at one moment pale as ivory, and the next saw them darkened almost with the scarlet of disimprisoned blood,—and, "Oh, Valerius!" said she, in a voice as full of tremour as

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by the violence of my daughter on the one hand, and of my sister on the other. They are women; and, for different reasons, the violence of both is excusable. I have been for a considerable part of this day with Licinius, and have heard from him enough to satisfy me how guiltlessly you yourself have been involved in this affair; and your speedy liberation from confinement is more than enough to confirm my belief of all that he said. Yet there is much which I do not understand—I pray you speak openly, and fear nothing—you have indeed nothing to fear. Was it in consequence of any private meeting with my niece—nay, I mean not to suspect you of any thing amiss—in one word, how was it that you happened to be taken into custody with that unhappy girl?"

"Sir," I replied, "you are a noble Roman, and the near kinsman of Athanasia. You have a right to put these questions, and whatever reluctance I may have to overcome, I feel that I have no right to refuse an answer. I might easily say, and truly, that it was not in consequence of any connection between myself and Athanasia that I came into the situation of which you know the consequences already. And yet in saying so, I should not tell you the whole truth, which I do desire to tell you. Know, then, that I came to this place on that unfortunate night, not only without any expectation of seeing Athanasia, but for a purpose entirely unconnected with her." And so I told Sempronius, plainly and distinctly, the story both of my unwilling entrance into the mausoleum, and of my forcible abduction from it. In short, I saw no reason to conceal any thing from the person who was most likely to be able to serve Athanasia, if any thing to serve her were possible. Finally, seeing how kindly he received this communication, I told him I had gathered from the lips of Sempronia, the moment before, that she considered me as the lover of Athanasia.

"What I have felt," said I, "what I still feel, and I perhaps shall ever feel, in regard to her, is nothing. I have never spoken of love to Athanasia, and I have no reason to suspect her of having ever thought of me otherwise than as a common acquaintance, perhaps a friend."

"It is well," he said; "you speak honestly, and as be

comes a man of the Valerian blood. Be assured, that your candour shall do you no injury in my estimation. But as for poor Athanasia, I swear to you I cannot yet bring myself to believe that she hath in reality been privy to such things as have been discovered concerning these Christians."

"Discovered!" said I. "I pray you, what has been discovered concerning them? If you allude to any of the wild stories that are circulated about their religion, you may depend upon it, 'tis all mere madness to believe a word of it. I have read in their sacred books myself, and I swear to you, that so far as I have seen, nothing can be more simple, benign, humane, than the morality inculcated by their leader."

"Poh! poh!" he answered; "I was not thinking of their creed, which, for aught I know or care, may be sublime enough; for there was always a mysterious sort of philosophy current among those old Asiatic people. But I speak of the designs of these men; in one word I speak of their conspiracy."

"Conspiracy!" said I, "What? How? Against whom? I will pledge my life, no conspiracy was sheltered beneath yon tower that night. I swear to you, they are simple people, and were thinking of nothing but their worship."

"Worship!" quoth he, with a smile; "I promise you it will not be so easy to persuade me that Cotilius has suddenly become a man of so much piety, either to our gods or to the deities (if they have any) of the Christians. What, Cotilius! By Jove, Rome does not hold at this moment a more bold, daring, godless rascal. You may as soon try to make me believe that Capaneus himself came to Thebes with a hymn in his mouth. No, no—the sworn friend of Domitian will not easily gain credit for his new-sprung sanctity."

"Cotilius!" I answered. "That was the very name of the man who seized me, as I have told you."

"I should have guessed as much," quoth he. "Yes, I promise you, how little soever poor Athanasia might have known, secrets you may depend upon it they had; and

Cotilius was well aware at what peril they should be revealed."

"The late example of Thraso," said I, "must indeed have alarmed him."

"What," said he; "do you speak of the old fanatic Syrian who died t'other day, rather than join in the sacrifice of Jupiter? My good friend, you know little of Cotilius, if you think it was of danger by such means avertible that he stood in terror. No, no—had the worst of his fears been the necessity to worship all the deities between Ganges and Rhine, I assure you he would have slept more soundly on his pillow than I think he has done ever since the death of Domitian—the most grateful sacrifice, by-the-way, that I believe either Olympus or Tartarus has received for these many days."

"But surely," said I, "you do not believe, Sempronius, that Athanasia had any knowledge of the man's secret designs, if he had any. He may have used Christianity, or desired to use it, as a weapon against the state; but be certain, neither she nor Thraso, nor any of those really attached to their religion, had any notion of his purpose."

"It may be so, indeed," he answered,—*"Heaven grant it may be so. I can indeed scarce imagine it to be otherwise. Christianity itself is a crime—a grievous crime; but were it possible to show that the poor girl had no other offence but her share in this fanaticism, means, methinks, might be contrived among us to move the clemency of Trajan. As for Cotilius, I will speak to you more at length of him anon. I will bid adieu to my sister, and take order about my daughter; and then, if it so please you, we shall walk together to the city."*

To this I agreed, but Sabinus, being apprehensive of appearing to come late home, rode on to the camp of the Prætorians. He whispered to me, however, that unless he were most necessarily detained, he should be ere long at the house of Licinius, in case he might be able to offer me any further assistance.

CHAPTER VII.

"To you," said the senator, as we went on, "who have so lately come from your island, the whole of this expiatory spectacle is probably quite new; but I am sure Sabinus could not have been aware what was its purpose, otherwise he would not have been guilty of so grievously offending the feelings of my sister, and some of the rest of my kindred, by remaining a witness of these most private rites. The priestess is indeed inconsolable, and her grief has set half her other passions in motion likewise. Athanasia was as dear to her as if she had been her daughter; so, in truth, she was to us all, ever since her own parents died. Well, if kind heart and noble understanding had been to stand vouchers for happiness, I should have said (father though I be myself) that Rome did not contain such a creature as my brother's orphan. But Cotilius, this knave Cotilius, has, I fear, blasted her hopes and ours."

"It occurs to me," said I, "and I should have mentioned it to you before, that there seemed to be no great understanding between this Cotilius and Athanasia. She was evidently displeased with many things he both said and did; and he, on his part, did not appear much to relish her interference."

"True," he continued, "you have already hinted as much; and I assure you, these are some of the circumstances in the whole case that tend most to excite my hopes concerning its termination. Great Heavens! what would Caius have said had he dreamt that his orphan girl was to be suspected of having sympathy with any of the dark designs of that shame to Roman knighthood? But you, of course, are a stranger to every thing of this man's history."

"With its end, at least," I replied, "it is like we may all be soon enough acquainted."

"Yes," quoth he, "Heaven grant we have not cause too deeply to remember it; but as for me, I have known him from the beginning, and I swear to you that from the first day I saw him, I considered his face as something ominous to look upon. Jove avert that I should prove in this to have been a keen-eyed augur. I have told you already that he was in great favour with Domitian."

"And the reverse, of course," said I, "both with Nerva and Trajan."

"Even so," he continued, "and with all reason; for you must know, that in all the disturbances which occurred on the accession of the last sovereign, and in particular in those most foul intrigues among the Prætorians, which at one time brought Nerva's own life into immediate danger, and compelled him to bare his neck to the swords of the soldiery at his palace gate, this Cotilius was more than suspected to have had a deep and most traitorous concern. When Petronius and Parthenius* were hacked in pieces, it needed no great witchcraft to detect some of the moving spirits who produced that catastrophe; but proof there was none at the time, and even had there been proof enough the good old man would have been too timid to act upon it. These things, however, could not be forgotten either by Nerva or his successor. Hitherto the strong hand of the present emperor has repressed every rebellious motion; but be sure that no man ever lived more an object of suspicion than this man has done ever since Nerva adopted Trajan."

"And you think," said I, "that among other intrigues, it had occurred to this man to make his own use of the Christians? despised and persecuted though they be, there can, indeed, be no doubt that their numbers are considerable, and that their faith is a strong bond of cohesion."

"Yes, yes, Valerius," replied the senator. "Now, at last, I think you begin to see something of the matter. Their numbers, Heaven knows how or why, multiply daily, in

* These were the principal conspirators by whom Domitian was slain. They were afterward butchered by the Prætorians, who regretted the tyrant; and it was supposed to be chiefly in consequence of that slaughter, and its shameful consequences to himself (for he was compelled, among other insults, to return public thanks to the butchers), that Nerva called to his aid the personal vigour and high military genius of Trajan.

spite of all the evils to which the least suspicion may subject them. Their faith, be it what it may, must indeed be admitted to contain abundant elements of power ; and, to tell you the truth, my only wonder is, that long ere now some bold designer has not taken, or attempted to take, advantage of the means presented by its formidable though untried energies. But still we must not forget, that so far as the rest are concerned, all this is mere conjecture. As yet the treason even of Cotilius rests on suspicion only, and report—with perhaps some aid from the scarcely less credible confession of a few hirelings ; and, after all, even if he were proved guilty of having nourished such schemes, the account you give of what you both saw and heard at their assembly inspires me with very considerable doubts whether he can be supposed to have ever as yet ventured to invite their participation :—unless, indeed, we are to imagine that they practised deception while you were with them.”

“As yet, then,” said I, “neither Cotilius nor any of the others have confessed any thing?”

“Nay,” replied he ; “all I can answer for is, that a few hours ago nothing had been confessed. What has passed in the interim, it is impossible for me to conjecture. The moment I heard of what had happened—and I even to hear of it might have been denied for a long time but for a female slave of Capito’s, who had been in the custom of attending upon Athanasia—I went to the Palatine, in hopes of attaining either assistance from Urbicus, or mercy, if that were all we could look for, from Trajan. But Urbicus told me very distinctly, that as yet he could give me no satisfaction except that of knowing that my niece was in a solitary and perfectly safe place of confinement. The charges, he said, against one of the leaders (he meant Cotilius) were great and heavy, and until these were sifted to the bottom, it was impossible that any access could be afforded to the person of any one of those who had been thrown into confinement. The emperor, he added, had himself shown symptoms of anxiety, much beyond what are usual with him on any similar occasion ; and had even, so he hinted, been in person investigating the matter at a distance from the city, during great part of the preceding night and day.

"To tell you the truth, Valerius, till this thing fell out, I was wont to consider the new violence about the Christians as somewhat unworthy of the enlarged and liberal intellect of Trajan; but it had not occurred to me, how easily the resources of such a superstition might be enlisted in the cause of discontent, if not of treason."

"And what," said I, "may now be, according to your views, the most probable course of procedure concerning the prisoners?"

"I know not," he replied; "nor, by Hercules! do I believe there is a man in Rome beyond the palace-gate who would venture more than myself to form guesses upon such a subject. No, sir, I promise you, secrecy is now the order of the day; and this Urbicus, and all the rest of them that are immediately about the prince, have learned to wear faces of such more than human wisdom that I confess I am sick when I look upon them. At times almost could I sympathize with the unreflecting vulgar, who regret (even now) the careless swagger of the discarded freedmen—but no, that thought is unworthy of a man and a Roman. Far be it from me to arraign the well-tryed prudence of the generous Trajan. I trust in Jove, our poor girl may be guiltless of this (if guilt, such as I have talked of, there be), and then I have no doubt her burden may be lightened. As for the weakness of mere superstition, I believe the prince is as free from it as any man of education in Rome. He has, indeed, been greatly alarmed about these Christians; but he is not acquainted with the east so well as his father was. He is at home in Gaul and Germany; but I think it likely enough he may have been somewhat deceived about any thing of Syrian origin, such as this superstition."

"Of course," said I, "nothing will be done in regard to Athanasia until all circumstances have been examined."

"Done!" said he; "so help me Phœbus Apollo, has not enough been done already to justify almost in a man more than you have seen among our women? Has not a whole family been disgraced? Has not the mausoleum of their fathers been prostituted for the mad, if not blasphemous, purposes of this barbarian sect? And has not all this been done through the silliness of a single girl? By Jove! here is matter enough to alarm the least su-

perstitious of us all. If the senate should be summoned, with what countenance should I show myself among my friends? Mad, foolish girl! How little did she know in what trouble she was to involve those who love her the best."

"Alas! Sempronius," said I, "think what a weight of suffering must have fallen upon herself alone—helpless—hopeless. I wish to heaven it were possible to learn where she is."

"Impossible," said he; "but why should I be thus tormenting you with my own griefs? I perceive, Valerius, that you indeed are more to be pitied than any of us. Well, come what may, I shall never be able to think unkindly of poor Athanasia. No, no; when women err, men are ever to blame: depend upon it, we shall find some cunning Cotilius or other has been at the bottom of the whole."

By this time we had come within sight of the house of Licinius, and the senator prepared to accompany me thither; "for," said he, "his head is cool, and that is more, I think, than any one would say either for you or for myself."

On entering the house we were informed that Licinius himself had supped abroad, and was not yet returned; and the freedman who told us so added, that his master appeared to be much engaged, and had gone out in company with some friends, who, he thought, were likely to detain him till a late hour. "In that case," the senator whispered to me, "I have no doubt he is occupied with the same affair as ourselves. I doubt not he will let me know if he has any thing to communicate. In the mean time, I must go to my brother's house, and in the morning we shall all of us probably be better able to speak further together with advantage." So saying, Sempronius departed, and I was left at liberty to inquire concerning Sextus.

I found my friend alone in his chamber, where he embraced me with all the ardour of juvenile affection. "Alas!" said he, "my dear Valerius, at any other time I might have found fault with you for taking so great a part in my griefs, and yet keeping so many of your own to yourself. But if it be indeed as Sempronia has said, I

should be a strange friend to choose this hour for complaining of such trifles as regard only myself ; my only concern is for you and for Athanasia. Speak, has no intelligence been yet obtained of her place of confinement, and is there no prospect of her also being restored to her liberty ? My heart bleeds for you, Valerius, for I see from your countenance that the truth has been told us."

"Sextus," I replied, "it was only because of the greatness of your own distresses that I concealed from your kindness any of mine. But when did you see Sempronia, and what did she tell you ?"

"My Valerius," he answered, "I shall tell you every thing to-morrow ; at present, I have only time to say, that the misfortune of Athanasia was communicated to Sempronia almost immediately by an old freedwoman, who had been in the habit of attending her when she went from home in secret, and who, going to the mausoleum to accompany her on her return, arrived there just in time to see what befell her. She saw you also (how she knew who you were I know not), and when she had told her story to Sempronia, the poor girl, before speaking even with her father, sent for me to come to her in the gardens. I did so ; all that passed I need not repeat ; but I hope my advice was the right one. At all events, I acted for the best, and my father, who is now aware of every thing, seemed to approve of what I had done. Oh ! Valerius, were Athanasia free, and you happy, many things have occurred to make me much more at ease than when you left us. My father is evidently much shocked with what Dromo told about Rubellia ; and as for Xerophrastes, he had not once spoken to him either yesterday or to-day. Indeed, neither of them have been much here. My father is continually exerting himself concerning Athanasia ; and Xerophrastes, I suppose, being conscious of the baseness of what he has done, is afraid of a discovery."

"Without doubt," I replied, "the solemn hypocrite has many fears. Even from what Dromo overheard of his conversation with Rubellia, one might gather as much."

"True," he replied ; "and his fears are all for himself. But, in the mean time, I take no notice of any thing

when I see him. It is of my father he is afraid, and when all things are discovered clearly, I promise you, I believe we may leave him very safely in his hands."

"In the mean time," said I, "your father is from home, and not expected to return very soon. I pray you, where is he?"

"That I know not," quoth he; "but I doubt not he is at the palace, or with some of the magistrates, assisting in the investigation of this conspiracy. As for me, I am sorry I must leave you, for I promised to meet Sempronia; and although I have nothing to tell her, I cannot fail in my appointment. She must have returned before this time from the mausoleum, where an expiatory sacrifice was to be made at sunset."

Sabinus, by this time, having executed whatever things were necessary at the Prætorian camp, had hastened to me once more, according to his kind promise. His look was more full of concern than when he had left me; and no wonder, for he had been hearing from his brother-soldiers of the affair of Cotilius, and that probably with many exaggerations.

I told him that Licinius was not at home, and that I proposed, in the mean time, accompanying Sextus a part of the way towards the suburban of Capito. The centurion insisted on going along with us, saying that he could not think of returning to the camp without having spoken with Licinius.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE centurion, in virtue of his office, had free access to the gardens of Trajan; so he led us by both a more delightful and a nearer path towards the Salarean Gate.*

* Trajan's private villa, where he chiefly resided, was on the Hill of Gardens, now called *the Pincian*. It was divided into two parts, the *Villa Inferior* and the *Villa Superior*,—these being connected by bridges.

Young Sextus then left us by ourselves, and we returned slowly through the beautiful groves of the imperial villa, in hopes of finding my kinsman by the time we should reach his mansion. But as we were walking very quietly along one of the broad green terraces, we heard voices in an adjoining alley, separated from us by luxuriant thickets of myrtle ; and Sabinus, whispering to me, "Hush, let us see what we have got here," insinuated himself with great dexterity among the verdant shrubs. I followed him with as little noise as was possible, and having found a convenient peeping-place, we soon perceived two figures, a man and a woman, walking side by side, apparently in earnest conversation, at some little distance from us in the moonlight.

"Come, Sabinus," I whispered, "it is some couple of lovers, perhaps ; I don't see what right we have to overhear their tender discourse."

"Peace, peace," quoth he, "if you stir they will detect us, and it is nothing unless it be known."

With some reluctance, I remained where I was ; but my scruples were at an end the moment I perceived who they were.

"Most noble, most illustrious lady," said one, who could be nobody but Xerophrastes, "this matter has indeed been conducted unfortunately, yet no reason see I why you should give way to so many groundless apprehensions. The only thing, after all, that you have lost, if indeed you have lost it, is the good opinion of Licinius ; for, as to that foolish boy—"

"Name him not, name him not," replied the Lady Rubellia, in a voice of much agitation ; "name not the silly stripling. Surely madness only can account for my behaviour."

"Madness !" quoth the stoic ; "yes, truly ; and who at certain moments is free from such madness ? As Euripides has expressed it (I think in the *Medea*), Venus, if she come in wisdom, is the wisest ; if otherwise, the most phrensied of all influences. The greatest and the wisest have not been exempt from such visitations. Banish it from your heart, noble lady, or replace it by something more worthy of your discernment. There

is, I think, but one pair of eyes in Rome that could have been blind to such perfections."

"Oh, Xerophrastes!" said she, "speak not to me of perfections. Alas! I was born under a deceitful star—a star of apparent splendour and real misery."

"Noble lady," he replied, "I swear to you that what tincture of philosophy I have imbibed is unable to sustain my serenity, when I hear such words from your lips; you are surrounded by all that externals can muster. It is your part to compose your mind, and then how should it be possible for you to taste of unhappiness? Think no more of that foolish Sextus."

"Think of him!" said she; "I swear to you I think of him no more than if he did not exist;" and she burst into tears as she spoke.

The philosopher took her hand with an air of the deepest sympathy, and at the same time drew the end of his mantle over his face, as if to conceal the extent of his participation in her distresses.

"Noblest, loveliest Rubellia," said he (half-sobbing I think), "this would make a child of a man. I swear to you I forget myself in your griefs; and yet," he added, laying his brawny hand upon his bosom, "if any powers there be that take cognizance of the affairs of humanity, they know that your poor servant has sorrows of his own. Alas! lady, this is, after all, a miserable world. There is no rest but in the affections, and behold how they are harassed on every hand by the invidious accidents of life. Philosophy proclaims her antidote, but the poison is everywhere; and it is all one course of being wounded to be cured, and being cured only to be more easily wounded again. I thought I had overcome all this, but alas!" (he sobbed audibly), "I feel that I am but a man, and that all is to begin again."

"Xerophrastes," interrupted the lady, composing herself, "must I in my turn become the comforter?" And so saying, she led the philosopher to a marble seat that was just opposite to us.

"Oh, Cithæron!" he proceeded, sitting down by her side, and yet as if not conscious of her interruption, "oh, ancient Cithæron! me fancy bears to the tranquil-

lity of thy shady groves—or to Tempe and the green recesses of her ever nemorous and gelid vales ! Oh, cities ! wo be to him who first invented the conglomeration of edifices, and the wide sweep of nature-violating walls !—Why did I, foolish and headstrong, abandon native felicity for the game in which so much must be lost, and so little can be gained ? Unhappy day that I first saw yellow Tiber winding among the stately prison-houses of Rome !”

“Prison-houses !” quoth the lady, “what is your meaning ?”

The philosopher made no answer for a moment, but continued sitting by the lady in an attitude of the most pensive contemplation. The moonbeams fell full on his high brow and the large massy features of his countenance, and on the robust limbs which emerged from below the stately folds of his mantle ; and I could not help thinking that there was something almost heroic, which I had never before remarked, in the whole of his appearance. Rubellia kept her eyes fixed steadfastly upon him, with an expression which I half thought had something in it of admiration. At last, she repeated her interrogation.

He started, as if from the profoundest musing, and said, “Oh, pardon my abstraction ! Surely I am not used to behave thus foolishly ;—I talked of prisons ; and what other name should be more fitting for the dwelling of those who are not free ?”

“The sway of Trajan,” said Rubellia, “can scarcely be talked of so harshly.”

“I speak not of Trajan,” quoth he, very gravely ; “I speak of the evil sway of custom, and the foul coercion of opinion, compared to which kingly or Cæsarean despotism is less than flax to brazen fetters.—Rome ! imperial Rome ! is one mighty prison ! and her noblest spirits are enslaved !”

“I understand you not,” quoth she, gazing earnestly upon his averted face.

“I should have known nothing of it,” replied he, “had I never deserted my paternal valley for the vain pleasures of Athens, and the magnificence of Rome.”

"You repent," said she, "that you ever visited Italy?"

"And if I leave Italy," quoth he, "who, I pray you, will regret my departure? Licinius is enraged with me, I can scarcely bear to look in his face,—and if he throws me off, where shall I bury my griefs, of which his desertion is the least?"

"You talk of this orator," she replied, in a haughty tone, "you talk of this most eloquent Licinius as if he were as great a man all the world over as he is in his little corner of the Forum. If you have offended him, it was in my service,—and think ye I am not able to make up for all of which Licinius can deprive you?—Speak—command me—say what I can do for you, and it shall be done."

Hereupon the manly breast of the philosopher was distended with a heavy sigh; having given vent to which, he laid his hand upon his forehead, but no winged word escaped the barrier of his lips.

"By Jove!" whispered Sabinus, scarcely able to contain himself, "by Jove, he has it!—'tis the most stoical malady of the heart."

"Xerophrastes," resumed the lady, "I pray you deal with me openly. If it be your wish to leave Rome, speak, and I shall put it in your power to retire to Greece as handsomely as you could ever have hoped to do from the family of Licinius. Of wealth, as you well know, I have enough both for myself and for my faithful friends, among whom, be sure, I place you in the first rank. Control your feelings, I pray you once more, and speak freely."

The philosopher lifted his hand from his face, looked upon the lady with eyes that glistened, or seemed to glisten, with emotion, and then clasped his brows again, as if wanting words or courage to express his wishes or his feelings. She, in the mean time, continued to regard the melancholy man with an aspect of so much anxiety, that—why should I deny it!—I half-suspected her of sharing the suspicion of Sabinus. After a pause of some moments, during which both preserved the same attitudes, Xerophrastes at last seemed in some measure to recover himself, and once more uncovered his eyes, which, however, he lifted not from the ground. The lady

laid her delicate fingers upon the strong hand which rested upon the knee of the stoic, and urged him, apparently in a tone of yet greater kindness than before, to make her the confidant of his griefs. It was then that the native boldness of the Thracian seemed to overcome the timidity of the dependant and the rhetorician. Hastily and fervently he pressed his lip upon the beautiful hand of Rubellia, and whispered something into her ear. She started, and I think blushed in the moonlight; but neither seemed offended very deeply with what he had said, nor with the gesture he had used.

"Softly, softly," whispered again the centurion, very bitterly; "be not ashamed, fair lady, of the love of thy servant."*

But (whether the echo of our whispers had reached her ear or not, I cannot tell) scarcely had these words been uttered, ere Rubellia started from her seat, and began to move pretty quickly down the shaded alley, as if towards the entrance of the gardens. Xerophrastes sat still for a moment, even after the lady had arisen, covering his eyes and part of his broad forehead with his hands, as if buried in his own thoughts too deeply to be with ease affected with a sense of things passing around him. Then, at last, he arose, and uttering an exclamation of surprise, walked after the noble dame, taking heed, however (it did not escape our observation), to arrange, as he rapidly followed her, the massive folds of his mantle into a graceful drapery. We very soon lost sight of them among the drooping boughs of the sycamores and old lime-trees, and the sound of their retreating footsteps died away upon the surface of the smooth green turf.

Sabinus with difficulty restrained himself till they were beyond the reach of his voice; but he then made himself ample amends by the violence of the laughter in which he began to indulge. "Ha!" said he, "is this to be the end of it? Most pensive ghost of Leberinus, is this to be thy successor?"

"Good heavens!" said I, "Sabinus, do you think it possible she should make the pedagogue her husband—she

* Ne sit ancillæ libi amor pudori.—HOR.

who was but yesterday so desperately enamoured of the beautiful young Sextus?"

"My dear islander," quoth the centurion, "do you remember the story of a certain beautiful boy, called Adonis?"

"To be sure," said I, "who is ignorant of the story of Adonis, or of the beautiful verses of Bion—

'I weep for fair Adonis—for Adonis is no more,
Dead is the fair Adonis—his beauty I deplore;
His white thigh with a tusk of white, the greenwood monster tore,
And now I weep Adonis,—for Adonis is no more.'"^{*}

"Well spouted, by my faith," quoth the soldier, "and with an excellent gravity, and most dolorous cadences. But think you Venus never altered the burden of her ditty? Have you never heard of Mars the blood-stained, the destroyer of men, the leveller of city-walls—nor of Anchises, the Dardan shepherd, wiser in his generation than one who inherited both his station and his opportunity—no, nor even of Vulcan, the cunning artificer, the lord of the one-eyed hammerers, the Lemnian, the chain-maker, the detector, the awkward cup-bearer, whose ministration, as honest Homer confesses, fills Olympus with inextinguishable laughter,—have you heard of all these, and I take it of a few more besides, and yet do you talk as if Venus, after the white boar's tusk had pierced the white thigh of her Adonis, had made no use of her beautiful girdle, but to wipe the tears from her pretty eyes withal?—her girdle, of which, heaven pity your memory, I know not how many blessed ages after Adonis had fallen, the same faithful bard said,

'In it is stored whate'er can love inspire—
In it is tender passion—warm desire—
Fond lover's soft and amorous intercourse—
The endearing looks and accents that can fire
The soul with passionate love's resistless force—
'Gainst which the wisest find in wisdom no resource.'[†]

Why, man, there seems every reason to think, that so far from thinking of him longer than any one else did, she

^{*} Elegy I.

[†] Iliad, 14.

was the very first to forget him. For, to this day, the girls both in Greece and Egypt put ashes on their hair one day in the twelvemonth, and I have seen them myself setting open coffins at their doors, in commemoration of Adonis ; but I never heard that Venus is less sportive that doleful night than any other in the year. No, my most innocent and unsuspecting Briton, although Sextus has hunted in woods hated by Rubellia, and although the quarry has for ever deprived her of him, be you nothing afraid lest grief be her poison. By the arrow of Cupid, I see no reason why our Thracian should not play the part of an Anchises, as well as any shepherd that ever trod the soil of Ida. Why, he looked so well in the moonlight, that, were this Latmos, I would advise Rubellia not to let Dian herself see too much of him."

"To be sure," I answered, "the externals of the philosopher are much altered for the better."

"You mean his dress," quoth the centurion ; "but I don't think that matters much. No, no, give the man his due, he may be neither Athenian nor philosopher ; but, by Jove, he has as trim a leg as ever a lady's eye need desire to look upon."

While uttering these last words, Sabinus drew up the skirts of his sagum, and was manifestly observing, not with displeasure, the nervous outlines of his own nether limbs.

"Why, Xerophrastes is well enough," said I, "but yet his legs want that decided compact air which I chiefly admire—"

"That firm, soldier-like, brazen rigidity," interrupted the centurion, still looking downward.

"That beautiful elasticity of the well-strung shank," said I.

"That fine, sharp cut, carrying the calf into the ankle," quoth he.

"That indescribable something," said I.

"By Jove," quoth the centurion, "these sandals of mine have been but three times buckled, and yet see you how they are beginning to give way ! I must change this fellow—I must certainly change him."

"Ha ! ha ! my dear Sabinus," said I, no longer able to contain myself ; "I am sure you will at least never wish to change the legs on which they are tied."

"You jackanapes," quoth he, "I believe the boy has been quizzing me this half-hour."

"Not a bit," said I, "not a bit, my dear Sabinus; I was only thinking, that if Rubellia wished to choose a husband by the shape of his legs, she might have shown better taste by looking elsewhere than on the stoic. He certainly is not to be compared, as to that point, with some men I have seen."

"I don't deny," replied the good-humoured man (easily pacified), "that Xerophrastes tends a little, a very little towards the clumsy. But perhaps the widow may not disapprove of that defect. Variety is certainly agreeable in most matters, and if she wished to find a pair of legs as different as possible from those of Leberinus, I must confess the stoic was just the man for her. Poor, good Leberinus!" continued he, again looking downwards, "I am sure your leg never stretched your sandal; I doubt if your widest latchet would have gone twice round the great toe of your successor, since such he is to be."

"After all," said I, "let her faults be what they may, do you not think it is a great shame, that a lady of her rank and fortune should throw every thing away upon such a great clumsy thick-legged ploughman as this—such a huge Thracian mountaineer—such a gluttonous porker?"

The centurion whistled.

"She," I continued, "who might perhaps have intermarried with one of the first characters of Rome."

The centurion whistled a still louder note; and with that we found ourselves once more close by the gate of the imperial gardens. A carriage was just driving off as we opened the postern. Sabinus ceased from whistling till it passed us,—muttered between his teeth, "By Jove! the fellow's ankles are as clumsy as door-posts,"—and then fell a-whistling again more lustily than ever.

He whistled on so till the sound of the chariot-wheels had died away in the hum of the distant streets; and then starting as if from some very profound revery, indulged himself in one of his own most jovial peals of laughter. "And well," said he, "there is one thing I am resolved on, and that is, that I shall be present at their wedding. By Jove, I was there the night she espoused Leberinus, and

I pitied her very sincerely, when I saw the pretty creature lifted over the old man's threshold in her yellow veil, which I could not help thinking concealed more sighs, if not more blushes, than are usual on such occasions. But I promise you the glare of her new torches, and the echo of the trumpets that are shortly about to be sounded, shall affect me with very different emotions; and then as to the epithalamium! Why, such a subject might make any man a poet. I think I shall try my hand on one myself. I wish we were but in Alexandria, I should contrive to make it find its way into every newspaper in the city.*

"Malicious man," said I, "is it not enough for you to enjoy the joke yourself?"

"Myself!" he replied; "by Jove, you are much mistaken if you think I shan't share it with half Rome! Why every one knows Rubellia, and I think this affair will produce more mirth, if it really goes on so, than any thing that has happened since the mad days of Poppæa. Rubellia and Xerophrastes—Venus and Saturn; and yet why should I speak of Saturn—I am sure it will be **THE GOLDEN AGE** for the Thracian."

"And what will the ladies do?" said I.

"Laugh at her, to be sure," replied he, "and perhaps imitate her example as soon as they have an opportunity. By the power of Mars, they are all alike. It is but flattery and boldness; and there is no one need despair. They look on themselves as so many superior spirits, which it is our whole business to worship; and no doubt they have their time of it. But when once you have found the charm to move them, why they dare refuse you nothing. They may babble as they will; but they are as powerless as the poor shades were before Tiresias."

"You do not always use to speak or to think of them quite so contemptuously," said I. "I am sure you have yourself worshipped in good earnest ere now, and with-

* The *acta diurna* of Alexandria were proverbial for being filled with all manner of ribaldry and private slander. They were the favourite reading of Domitian. But there is no reason to think that the daily papers (I had almost said the daily press) of Rome ever ventured upon the same species of license.

out any thought of tyrannizing over the object of your adoration.

The centurion whistled again a shrill note, and replied, with great emphasis, "My dear Valerius, if you get Athanasia to yourself, as I hope, in spite of all these troubles, you yet shall (since you have set your heart upon it), take my advice, and carry her with you to Britain before she has lived one week among these Roman matrons. The moment a girl is married they consider her as one of themselves, and tell her every thing; and, by Jove, there is no good to be got from their lessons. Proud, haughty, and imperious, how fortunate it is that they are also vain, silly, luxurious,—and, above all, that they are the fools of flattery. That is the chain that can bind them to the earth, however they carry their heads in the clouds. We were talking of all the fine things that Homer has put into the girdle of Venus. Well, flattery fell to our share, and I think it is a fair equivalent for the whole bunch of them."

CHAPTER IX.

SUCH talk passed between myself and the somewhat irritated centurion, as we proceeded with slow steps down the descent from the gardens of Trajan, and on towards the vicinity of Licinius's house. But as we advanced into the more peopled region of the city, we found the streets full of crowds and clamour, insomuch that we had some difficulty in walking together, and that such quiet discourse as had occupied us could no longer be carried on. The evening was one of the most lovely I had ever seen, and the moon was shedding a soft and yellow light upon the lofty towers and trees, and upon all that long perspective of pillars and porticoes, with which those proud Roman streets were, for the most part, lined on either side. Yet many groups of citizens were seen running to and fro with torches in their hands; while many more were sta-

tionary in great and impenetrable crowds, which, although there was much noise of merriment, and many songs and shouts of laughter among them, had the air, as it seemed to us, of being detained in expectation of some show or spectacle, yet more attractive than their present sources of amusement.

And accordingly we had not jostled on much farther, ere there arose behind us a peal, apparently at a considerable distance, of what seemed to me to be martial music; which the multitude around no sooner heard, than their noise and acclamation became more violent than ever. Ever and anon, nevertheless, they hushed themselves for an instant, as if to ascertain the progress of those who sounded the instruments; and then the more near they seemed to have come towards them, the more jubilant again and triumphant was the renewal of their outcries. Sabinus expressed at first some little displeasure, in having our return impeded after this fashion, and began to look about him, in case any inferior or off-shooting street might furnish us an opportunity of making our escape from these vociferous multitudes. But ere the sound of the approaching music had once or twice reached his ear, he became satisfied that all this was quite in vain.

"By my faith," said he, "I believe it is some troop of the Galli—yes, yes—I cannot be mistaken—there is the cymbal—there again is the shrill echo of the Phrygian horn, which to me sounds always as if the breath could not come without agony through its twisted folds—and—ay—there can be no doubt about it now, there is the hoarse big drum, by which they design to set forth the roaring of Cybele's lions. Well, we shall be able to distinguish the squeak of the beardless priests themselves by-and-by. We must e'en be content, Valerius, and remain here till the torches pass us; for the deeper we might advance into the city to-night, you may be sure we should find ourselves only so much the worse. I think these fellows might satisfy themselves with their *Hilaria*."

"That, I believe," said I, "is their great feast at the vernal equinox, when they wash the lions and chariot of the goddess in Tiber."

"Yes," quoth he; "and I promise you it is a grand

sight after its fashion ; for they spare no expense, and they generally show lions such as the amphitheatre cannot exhibit once in ten years. The last time I was present, there were four tawny monsters yoked abreast to drag the great rumbling brazen chariot of the goddess ; but how grand soever the sight of them was, you may guess there remained not many to face it in the streets. Windows, however, balconies, and so forth—all were crowded ; and by Jove, to hear the growling of the noble brutes, as they scoured down the Sacred Way, with the huge wheels clattering behind them, and then the hallooing of the mad priests, whose command over them seemed to be wonderfully perfect—I don't think there is a single religious ceremony in Rome that is worthy of being named in the same day with it. The east, after all, is the true seat of horrors ; and indeed, they say, even the feast of Cybele is nothing at all here, compared to what it is in Ephesus, or Antioch, or Alexandria. But I have never had the good luck to witness it in any of these places. I wish the emperor would grant me the reversion of their cast-off lions ; for I believe they never use the same set twice. I think I could contrive to make a snug thing of it, with the assistance of our black-faced friend Aspar."

"And what," said I, "may be the nature of this procession which we are about to witness ? Shall we see the lions ?"

"No, no, these are never shown but once in the twelve-month, man, on the great chariot-day of which I was speaking. But the priests themselves are not satisfied with being exhibited quite so sparingly, and that is what I was complaining of. All through the summer these fellows are running about among the villages, with a brazen image of the goddess, and wherever they arrive, the poor people that hear the sound of their fearful horns and cymbals are fain to come and pay them contributions—which they call feeding the lions of Cybele. Without doubt, it is from one of these marches that they are now returning : and hear them ! By Jove, they do the thing well, beardless though they be ; I am sure you will confess 'tis the finest music of the sort you ever heard."

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"Indeed," said I, "'tis an awful music, and such as may well be imagined to have had its origin in hoary woods, and beside old dark rivers rushing through the wilderness."

"Atys, Atys," quoth the centurion; "ay, I thought it must needs be the song of Atys they were singing—mark, now, how the strain varies,—sinks, swells, and then sinks again. I will tell you what the meaning of this is. It is meant to set forth the flight of the poor creature over wood and wild hill, and down every yawning ravine, and then up the rocks, and away again over the moors; and all the way the roar of the lions and the clanging of the furious cymbals is pursuing him on the breeze. By Jove, if sounds were to drive a man mad, these certainly are the likeliest I ever heard."

The Galli meantime had advanced so near to us that even I, who had never listened to them before, could comprehend some of the words of the chant, to which all this accompaniment was applied; and, as the centurion had judged, the burden of all was indeed continual glorying over the disaster of Atys. I remembered the most mournful verses of Catullus concerning the same fable, and therefore could not help shuddering at hearing it made the subject of such different celebration. But as for the centurion, he, now that all was in our distinct hearing, was, I thought, chiefly taken up with the excellence of the music; or at least, if there was any deeper feeling in his mind, I could perceive no trace of it in the style wherein he raised his stout voice to swell the chorus of the advancing priests. They that stood near, hearing him do so, eagerly followed his example; so that now the clear notes of the priests of the goddess were contrasted, not only with the deep murmuring of their own music, but with recurring bursts of rough and manly melody, from all the great multitudes through which their march was to be.

At last they came quite close to us, and passed on dancing and singing around the image of the goddess, right before the place where we were standing. A path being opened for them by the crowd all along, they made no halt in their progress, but went on at the same

pace, some of them leaping high from the ground as they dashed their cymbals, and others dancing lowly while they blew the long Phrygian trumpets and crooked horns of brass. The image itself was seated in a brazen chariot, to which brazen lions also were fastened, the whole being borne on the shoulders of some of the assistants. Behind it came others, beating great hollow drums; and then again more, leaping, and dancing, and singing, like those who preceded it. They were all clad in long Asiatic vests, with lofty tiaras, and their countenances, as well as their voices, intimated sufficiently that they were ministers of the same order to which the hapless Atys had belonged. Yet nothing but enthusiasm and triumph could be discovered in their manner of singing that terrible chant; for I suppose it was all of the same strain with the part of it which was sung as they went by the centurion and myself.

“ Now is he come unto the Phrygian sea—
Below him, on the waste and yellow shore,
The mighty billows everlastingly
Dash, like devouring monsters—dash and roar.

“ He gazes wide for hope, but hope is none—
For, even like the beasts from whom he flies,
The maned billows seem for him to groan;
Madness is in their foam and in their cries.

“ Fly, Atys, fly,
The car is nigh;
The haunted wood
O'erhangs the flood;
The heavy breeze
Is in the trees;
The fierce waves leap
Upon the steep:
Yet fly, mad Atys, fly, and hear
Her lions roaring nearer, and more near,
Fly, Atys, fly!

“ Unto the forest wilt thou turn again?
Free paths and wide, mad Atys, wait thee there.
Fly where the oak-boughs droop upon the plain,
Fly where beneath the pines the earth lies bare.

“ Plunge, Atys, plunge into the reverend gloom
Of the most ancient bearded wilderness;

No hope is there of shelter from thy doom,
Yet haste, young Atys, haste thee not the less.

"Fly, Atys, fly !
The car is nigh ;
The solitude
Of the black wood
Hath coverts good,
Where many a brood
Of beast and fowl
May scream and howl.
But no dark lair
For thee is there,
No shelter kind
Thy feet shall find :—
Fly, Atys, fly, and in thine ear
Be still the lion-roar near, and more near.
Fly, Atys, fly !"

So singing, they had not advanced much beyond the spot where we were standing, ere they stopped of a sudden their hitherto rapid dance of progress, and, placing the chariot and image of Cybele between the pillars of one of the porticoes that run out into the street, began a more stationary and solemn species of saltation, in front of the sacred emblems. When they had finished this dance also, and the more stately and measured chant of supplication with which it was accompanied, the priests then turned to the multitude, and called upon all those who revered the Didymæan mysteries, and the awful powers of their goddess, to approach her image and offer their gifts. And immediately, when they had said so, the multitude that were beyond formed themselves into a close phalanx, quite across the street, and torches being conveyed into the hands of such as stood in the foremost rank, there was left forthwith in front of the image and of the priestly attendants an open space, brightly illuminated, for the convenience, as it seemed, of those who might come forward to carry their offerings to the foot of the statue. And, indeed, it appeared as if these were not likely to be few in number ; for the way being quite blocked up by those torch-bearers, no one could hope to pass on easily without giving something, or to pass at all without being observed. Not a few chariots, therefore, and litters also, having been detained in consequence of the crowd upon the streets, the persons who were seated

in these vehicles seemed to be anxious, as soon as possible, to present their offerings, that so the path onward into the city might be cleared to them, by command of the priests. It was necessary, however, as it turned out, that each person in advancing to the chariot of Cybele should imitate the dancing motions practised by the Galli themselves; and this circumstance, as may well be imagined, was far from being the most acceptable part of the ceremony to some of those who had thus been detained. A few of the common sort, both men and women, advanced at once boldly into the open ring, and with great appearance of joy went through all the necessary gesticulations. But, at first, none of the more lordly tenants of the chariots and litters seemed to be able to prevail on themselves to follow the example.

At length, however, the impatience even of these dignified persons began to overcome their reluctance; one and another red-edged gown was seen to float in lofty undulations across the torch-lighted stage, and when a handful of coin was heard to ring upon the basin of the goddess, you may take for granted the priests half-cracked their cheeks in blowing horn and trumpet, and clattered upon their great tambarines at least as violently as if they had made prize of another Atys. But how did the centurion chuckle when he observed (for we by this time had squeezed very near to the statue), that one of the next chariots was no other than that of Rubellia herself, and perceived that she and the stoic were now about to pass onward like the rest, at the expense both of giving money to the lions of Cybele, and of exhibiting their agility before the eyes of all that multitude.

"Jove in heaven!" cried he, "I thought the garden scene was all in all; but this beats it to atoms! Behold how the sturdy Thracian tucks up his garment above his sinewy knee, and how, nodding to the blows of the tambarine, he already meditates within himself the appropriate convolutions of the dance. And the pretty widow! by the girdle of Venus, she also is pointing her trim toe, and, look ye! better and better, do you not see that she has given her veil to the stoic, that so she may perform the more expeditely?"

"I see it all," said I ; " but do speak lower, dear Sabinus ; for, be sure, they would neither of them poise themselves half so gracefully, if they thought we were observing them."

"Hush !" quoth he, turning his head another way ; " I suspect the stoic's eye has already caught us."

Hearing this, I should of course have looked, after the example of the centurion, in another direction ; but I know not if you have experienced what I have oftentimes done, that, as if under the influence of some serpentine fascination, one's eyes are in such situations extremely apt to rest themselves just on the object which most of all they should avoid. And so it was with me ; for, instead of looking away, I perversely directed my eyes right upon the philosopher, who was so near that he could not possibly mistake me, or dream of my mistaking him for any one but himself. And he also, perhaps fascinated like myself in the style of which I have been speaking, although it was too evident that the sight of me was extremely unwelcome, appeared, nevertheless, to be constrained to keep his optics fixed upon me,—insomuch that I could not refrain from saluting him, to which he replied by a very low bow, and an unfortunate attempt towards a smile of courtesy. The widow, who could not help seeing what passed between us, saluted me also, but with an air of considerable confusion, for the blood mounted into her face, and suffused, for a moment, with deep crimson both her neck and arms ; and altogether, it was manifest that our recognition of her in such a situation, and in such company, had affected her with much perturbation. The centurion, however, who had by this time turned round again, no sooner saw that the ice was broken, than in he plunged with a volley of dashing compliments—betraying in nothing either surprise, or any extraordinary species of feeling beyond what is common when acquaintances chance to fall in with each other fortuitously.

"All hail," said he, "fair lady ! and all hail, most reverend friend Xerophrastes ! What a beautiful moonlight evening this is ! Come, no shyness, old cock of Hymettus ! foot it away, foot it away, man ! The lady will never

have courage, if you don't give her your hand. Come, now, and remember, my good friend, that even although you be a stoic, you are an Athenian into the bargain. Come, polite sage, hop on, and convince us that philosophy has not quite washed out your original urbanity and elegance."

There was always so much good-nature in the manner of the worthy centurion, that it was almost impossible for any one to be offended even by his sarcasms. His broad ruddy face seemed made for the very habitation of smiles; his lips were ever wreathed with benignity, not to be mistaken; and the tones of his voice were so rich and easy that Thersites himself would not have dared to suspect them of malice. Yet Xerophrastes, on this occasion, appeared to be by no means delighted with the style of his salutation. A frown passed very darkly over his forehead, and he turned to the blushing lady with an air of the highest impatience. She, on her part, although she was probably far from deriving any pleasure from what had passed, had the wit to disguise, in some measure, the feelings of her mind. She cast, therefore, a smile of airy and good-humoured rebuke (such at least it was designed to be) upon the mirthful centurion, and said, "Come, Sabinus, methinks it might become you better to offer me your hand yourself for this sacred dance, than to play off your jokes so upon Xerophrastes, who cannot help himself any more than the rest of us. Come, centurion, I insist upon having your company."

"My dear lady," quoth the centurion, advancing close to Rubellia, "you well know that my services are always at your disposal; but it seems to me that you are already engaged for this dance; and I am sure you will break the heart of Xerophrastes if you disappoint him, now that he has tightened his girdle, and plucked up his mantle, and made so many preparations. No, no; the luck is his for this time, and don't let him be deprived of it. You see how conscientious I am, my dear stoic; no more words, I pray you. Lead forth your fair partner; and Valerius and I, since we can do no better, shall follow in your train."

Xerophrastes heard all this with a countenance but little

mollified. He turned, however, once more to the lady ; and then forcing another smile, and gathering up the folds of his upper garment, no longer hesitated. She gave her hand therefore to the sage, and both, catching the beat of the instruments, forthwith sprung into the open place, and advanced with the usual motions towards the statue of the goddess. There was a good deal of constraint, it is not to be denied, in the manner of the lady ; yet, on the whole, she acquitted herself in a style that bespoke her familiarity with all graceful exercises. But it was far otherwise with the stately disciple of the Porch, who, although he displayed brawny limbs, and abundance of agility after a fashion, yet executed every movement in a way so unequivocally rustic, that not a few of the youthful bystanders were not to be restrained from tittering, when they contemplated his clumsiness.

"Well done, well done !" quoth one.

"The rhetorician for ever !" cried another, clapping his hands.

"Take care, Master Philosopher," quoth a third ; "your mantle is sweeping up all the dust."

Xerophrates, hearing this last ejaculation, could not help looking behind him to see as to the condition of his garments, and then the titter became universal ; for the truth is, he had them drawn up very tightly, and indeed much higher than was at all necessary, even for the full exhibition of his limbs. With less than stoical equanimity did he regard the crowd of laughers behind him ; and, of a truth, the last part of his dancing was yet more awkward than the first. The munificence of Rubellia, however, gained to her all the applauses of the sacred functionaries. The tiara'd heads were bowed in reverence before her ; and she and her companion, after having deposited their contributions, were cheered out of the circle with a most cordial peal of drum, horn, and trumpet.

While this peal yet continued in all its vociferation, the jolly centurion touched me gayly on the elbow, and saying, "Now for it, Valerius ; have you your sesterces ready ?" leaped forth with a most warlike and determined air, having his hands stuck in his sides, and causing the folds of his sagum to vibrate in a wonderful manner, by the po-

tent exercitation of his well-strung muscles. The contrast between the reluctant clumsiness of the sulky philosopher and the ready and well-satisfied hilarity of his successor was by no means lost upon the multitude of spectators ; insomuch that the very first appearance of the new performer was greeted by a universal clapping of hands, and every other manifestation of delight. Instead of being offended by their mirth, the Prætorian distributed his smiles on every side ; and observing a buxom young woman in one corner, who seemed afraid to trust herself before so many eyes, he, without interrupting his step, took her gallantly by the hand, and so performed the rest of the dance in a manner which yet more increased the satisfaction of all who were looking on it. The girl had a few pence in her hand ; but the centurion would not permit her to pay any thing, laying down himself a double ransom, and saying, perhaps rather too audibly, " No, no, pretty maid ; you have given enough to the goddess, since she has beheld your blushes."

The maiden's blushes were probably not diminished by all this courtesy from a person of such figure ; but, however that might be, even the priests of Cybele were well pleased with the centurion, and I think that his good-humour procured for him a parting salute not much less violent than had been purchased by all the munificence of the widow. I know not what it was that all this while kept me back ; but I could not, at the moment when Sabinus began, gather confidence to begin along with him : and then his dancing attracted so much notice, that it would have been a sort of intrusion had any one ventured to occupy the space till he was done with it. I waited, therefore, in hopes of being able to go forth with some ordinary group of performers ; but no such opportunity immediately occurred.

One of the next that exhibited himself was a very red-nosed senator, whose gestures threw even those of Xerophrates completely into the shade. He appeared to be labouring under the relics of a grievous gout ; for he had his feet wrapped round with I know not how many folds of linen, and whenever he essayed to spring from the ground, one would have thought he had trodden upon

some nest of aspics. His hands meanwhile were held far out from him, and clenched bitterly, and at every successive bound I could see him grinding his teeth for agony. Whether it had been so that the man was well known among them, I cannot say; but if it were so, his character must certainly have been held in little favour by the multitude; for to every sardonic grin of his, the faces round about him replied by showing all their teeth; and one of the little boys, following close at his heels, was not withheld by any respect for the laticlave from imitating all the gestures both of his infirmity and of his ill-nature. I took it for granted that he must needs be some greedy and usurious old extortioner; and, indeed, the offering he deposited neither sounded very loudly on the basin of the goddess, nor received any great marks of thankfulness from the music of the priests.

I was just about to follow this ancient, and rejoin my companion, when some one from behind laid hold of my arm, and I heard at the same moment a whisper of, "Valerius—stop, Valerius; whither are you going?" I looked round naturally to see who it was that thus addressed me, and I perceived that he was an old man, wrapped in a very large and deep mantle, the folds of which, however, were so arranged that I could see very little of his features. I could not for my life imagine who this could be; but the man, stepping a pace or two backward, beckoned to me with his hand, and I, suspecting no evil, immediately followed him. Seeing me move towards him, he drew back yet farther, and ascended a few steps which conducted to the portico of the adjoining house. I hesitated for a moment; but his inviting gesture being repeated, I also entered within the shade of the pillars, and then the old man, dropping his mantle on his shoulders, said, "Valerius, do you not remember me? We met last at the tomb of the Sempronii."

"At the tomb of the Sempronii!" said I; and gazing earnestly upon him, I recognised, indeed, the features of the Christian priest, who had treated me on that eventful evening with so much courtesy; but my surprise was great, as you may believe, to find him in such a situation; for I myself had seen him conveyed away between armed

guards, and I could not imagine by what means he, of all others, should have so soon regained his freedom.

He observed my astonishment, and gently smiling, said, in a low voice, "My dear friend, perhaps I might have as much reason to be surprised with seeing you here, as you have in seeing me. But follow me into this house, where, I assure you, you shall be both safe and welcome, and where we may communicate to each other whatever particulars have occurred."

The hope of perhaps hearing something concerning Athanasia determined me. I cast a look towards Sabinus, and saw him in the front row on the other side, attentively engaged in witnessing the performance. In short, I had no means of giving him any information, and hoping that he might continue to amuse himself so for a few minutes longer, I permitted the old man to lead me into the vestibule of the mansion. The slaves who were waiting there seemed to receive him with much respect; and he, on his part, had the air of being familiar with them. He passed them, saying, "Do not trouble yourselves, I shall rejoin your master," walked before me up stairs, and shortly ushered me into a chamber situated over the hall of entrance, where a grave and elderly personage was reclining close by the open window which looked out upon the crowded and noisy street. Our host perceived not our approach till we had come close up to his couch, for he was occupied with what was going on without, and the clamours of the Didymæan music might have easily drowned a noise much more obtrusive than that of our footsteps.

But when the old man accosted him, and said, "Pontius, I have been successful. Here is my friend, young Valerius," the stranger rose up, and saluted me with the greatest kindness.

"I fear Valerius will think he has done but indifferently in exchanging a scene of so much gayety for the conversation of two quiet old men; however, he will pardon me for being desirous of seeing him here, when he learns that I was one of his father's oldest friends, and served with him many campaigns, both in Germany and Britain. I should have been ill pleased had I heard that Valerius

had been in Rome, and had departed without my having an opportunity of retracing in him, as I now do, the image of my old comrade."

There was something so kindly in the manner in which these words were uttered, that I could not help being much gratified ; as, indeed, who is not gratified when he hears affectionate commemoration of a departed parent ? I answered, therefore, in terms correspondent to my feelings ; but I could not help being all the while exceedingly curious to know something of the connection between Pontius and the old Christian, and I think my curiosity was not so well disguised as to escape the notice of either of them. A wine-flask, however, stood upon the table, and I was constrained to pledge the old friend of my father in a cup of excellent Falernian, and to listen and reply to not a few questions concerning the situation of my mother and myself, before I could lead the conversation into the channel I desired ; and at length, indeed, it was not so much any thing I said, as the readiness of the old priest himself, which gave to it that direction ; for the very first pause that occurred in the discourse between Pontius and myself, he filled up, by saying, " And now will Valerius pardon me for asking, if he has ever looked again into the narrative of Luke, or whether his curiosity, in regard to these matters, has been entirely satisfied by the adventures of one unfortunate night ?"

The manner in which Pontius regarded me when the priest said this left me no doubt that he himself had embraced, or was at least favourably inclined to, the opinions of the Christians ; so I answered without hesitation, " My curiosity, instead of being satisfied with what I saw that evening, received new strength ; but you may easily believe that the troubles in which I was involved, and still more the troubles with which I know some others yet to be surrounded, have hitherto taken away from me both the means and the power of gratifying my curiosity as I would wish. But tell me, I pray you, by what means is your imprisonment at an end ?"

" My friend," replied the priest, " you speak naturally, but rashly. I believe you yourself are the only one of those surprised in the tower whose imprisonment has as yet terminated. Yet hope, good hope is not absent,—

above all, I trust there is no reason to despair concerning that dear child who interfered in your behalf, when a rash, a bold, and, I fear me, a false man had drawn his weapon to your peril. As for me, I have but gained the liberty of an hour or two, and long ere morning's dawn I shall be restored again to my fetters."

"Your fetters!" said I; "excuse me, but you speak in a manner which entirely perplexes me. Am I to understand, that by the connivance of a Roman jailer you are this night at liberty to perambulate the streets of Rome? Who is the man that has virtue enough to place so much reliance on your promise?"

"Young man," answered the priest, "he is a Christian."

"Even for his sake," said I, "the name is honourable."

The old man smiled when I said this, and then, as if correcting himself, looked very gravely upon me, and said, "Valerius, I pray you speak not things which may hereafter give pain to your memory. Already you have read something of the life of ONE for whose sake our name is indeed honourable—of Him I trust you shall ere long both read and think more; but in the mean time speak cautiously, I pray you, and remember, that where mercy is most abundant offence is most unworthy."

"Felix," interrupted Pontius, "you speak too seriously concerning an involuntary and unconscious error. Valerius meant only to express his admiration of the jailer's behaviour."

I nodded assent to this; and the old man, again smiling reverently after his fashion, went on, saying, "You must even pardon the jealousy of an old servant (however unworthy) for the honour of his Master. In truth, the man hath conducted himself both like a Roman and a Christian, and most surely his generosity shall draw no evil on his head. But how shall I bless God, who threw my lot, since captivity it was to be, into a place where such authority as this was to have the superintendence of me. Yet more, how shall I be sufficiently grateful, that SHE, in all things so delicate, although in nothing fearful, has shared the same blessing. In the worst, it is indeed true that there is an eye to regard the faithful, and an arm to sus-

tain them; but when I think what might have been—when I think that some brutal ruffian, and some gloomy dungeon, might have received my beautiful, my innocent child—”

“Heavens!” said I, “what do I hear!—Is Athanasia indeed lodged in the same prison with yourself, and is she also thus favoured?”

“I thank my God and hers,” replied the old man, “that it is even so. The rest of those that were taken with us have been dispersed I know not where; but ever since that time she and I have been under the roof of this our brother.”

“And may she also go abroad thus freely?”

“Valerius,” he replied, “you are much mistaken if you think that I embrace such freedom for my own sake, or for any purposes of mine own. What I do for the service to which I am bound, think not that Athanasia will ever desire to do for herself. She abides her time patiently where the lot hath been cast for her; in due season, if such be the will of the Lord, she shall regain that in truth of which this is but the shadow.”

“God grant our prayer,” said Pontius, “and not ours only, but the prayer of all who know her, and have heard of this calamity! I think,” he continued, turning to me, “I think my brother mentioned that he had met you, along with Athanasia, at the villa of her uncle.”

I bowed assent, and he proceeded.

“Whatever the exertions of her family and their friends can accomplish, most surely shall not be a-wanting. Would that those who are linked to her by ties yet more sacred had the power, as they have the will, to serve her! Yet hope must never be rejected. The lamp yet burns on, and who knows what the investigations of this very night may produce? The true accomplices of Cotilius must of necessity, I think, be discovered; and then Trajan will be satisfied that the Christians stand guiltless, at least of that treason. Let us wait patiently, and hope ever the best.”

“Alas!” said I, turning myself round to the priest, “what avails it to speak of hoping? If to follow this faith be a crime, how can any one hope to follow it with-

out being continually liable to accidents at least as unfortunate? In Rome, at all events, what madness is it thus to tempt the fate which impends over the discovery of that which it must be so difficult, so impossible to conceal? Why, supposing you to be at liberty once more, why do you not abandon the capital, and seek some retreat where privacy might be more attainable—where that might be done in safety which here cannot be without the continual presence, at least without the continual dread, of peril?"

The old man heard me speak all these things (which I did hurriedly and vehemently) with a countenance of the utmost gravity. When I stopped he said nothing, but laid his finger on his lips in token of silence, and pointed with his other hand to the open window by which we were sitting. I listened, and heard distinctly the shrill voices of the priests of Cybele, as they broke forth above the choral murmurs of the drums and cymbals, and I perceived that the bloody legend of Atys was once more the subject of their song. The old man held his finger steady on his lip, and I could comprehend the words of their strain quite as well as if I had been close to them upon the street.

But, as the dark rites of that Idæan superstition have never penetrated into our island, I cannot hope to give you any notion of the wild and gloomy impression which their mode of chanting such words as these is calculated to produce. You will understand, however, that the first part was always done slowly and solemnly, and that, in the latter, the voices of the priests ran rapidly and violently over the notes.

"Black—black and lazy rolls Eurymedon
(The great Pamphylian river) to the sea;
Full many a dusky shadow rests thereon,
From rock and old impending hoary tree.

"Upon the margin of the heavy stream,
With rustling oak-leaves scatter'd red and sear,
Stands the wan Phrygian boy, as in a dream,
Worn out and wasted with his wild career.

"Above him, like a pale and shivering sprite,
The Moon glides in the melancholy sky;
While ever and anon the winds of night,
Amid the bare bleak branches, groan and sigh.

"How long, mad Atya, wilt thou stand,
 With fixed eye and folded hand;
 Nor hear what terrors are behind
 On the dreary mourning wind?
 Mother, 'tis not the voice of that black river,
 Rolling slow to ocean ever—
 Mother, 'tis not the whisper of the breeze
 To the gray brotherhood of trees.
 On flows the wave, the night-blast swells and dies;
 But vainly from thy car mad Atya flies!"

The ancient waited till the voices were drowned again in the clamour of the instruments, and then said to me, "Young man, do you know to what horrid story these words of theirs refer? Do you know what sounds all these are designed to imitate? Do you know what terror—what flight—what blood—what madness are here set forth in honour of a cruel demon—or rather, I should say, for the gain of these miserable and maimed hirelings? Do you know all these things, and yet give counsel of flight and of cowardice to me, upon whose head the hand of Christ's holy apostle hath been laid? Truly, it becometh well the appointed leaders to turn back and flee, when they perceive the glittering of the spears of the adversary, and hear the proud shouts of those who provoke them to the onset. Young man, for all her bonds, it is not by such words as these that Athanasia might be wrought upon; God, be sure, hath granted to her youth, tender though it be, such heart, and such confidence, as long, long years of trial have with difficulty conferred on others (less favoured) of his servants."

The moon, which fell full on the old man's countenance as he spoke so, showed his pale cheek suffused for the moment with a more than boyish blush, and his eyes sparkling not the less brightly because a tear hung translucent within its lids. He paused for a moment, and then, sinking his voice almost into a whisper, and folding his hands before him, he proceeded.

"Yes, my friend, it is even so; but Valerius may be excusable, although he as yet understands little of the feelings his words have perhaps too vehemently aroused. I trust it shall not long be so, and that, if indeed we shall ever be set free from this captivity, we shall have our

return to the fellowship of the faithful hailed by a new son and a new brother, not less dear than any from whom we have been separated. Read, my dear Valerius, read and ponder well: my prayers, and the prayers of one who is far purer than me—they are ever with you. But now, since I have introduced you to Pontius, why should I delay here any longer? He, both for your father's sake and for your own, and for that of the faith (of which you have had some glimpses), will abundantly aid you in all things. Deal not coldly nor distantly with him. I commit you into his hands, as a brand to be snatched from the burning."

Pontius, during the address, reached forth his hand and grasped mine firmly, as in token of his acquiescence in all the old man expressed. He, on his part, having made an end of what he designed to speak, arose, and, looking into the street, said, "These jugglers have now departed to their dens, and the gaping multitudes that attended them have dispersed. But I still see one person walking up and down, as if expecting somebody, where their dancing took place; and it seems to me that it is the same, Valerius, who was in your company when you walked hither." I looked, and perceived that it was indeed Sabinus; and I heard him whistling to himself, as he walked to and fro on the bright side of the pavement. I therefore bade them adieu hastily, saying that I had no thought my friend would have detained himself so long for me. As I was going out, however, I could not help saying to the old priest, "Dear father, when shall I see you again, and when shall I hear further of Athanasia?"

The old man paused for a moment, and then said, "To-morrow, to-morrow at noontide, be in the Roman Forum over-against the statue of Numa. You will there find some tidings for you."

"Surely," said I to myself, "this old man will not dare to walk at noonday in the Forum; but after what I have seen, what shall appear impossible?"

I then rejoined Sabinus, who took my arm without interrupting his whistle, and so we walked briskly towards the house of my kinsman. The centurion plainly intimated that he took it for granted I had been engaged in some-

thing which I wished to keep from his knowledge ; but such affairs made no great impression on him ; and after laughing out his laugh, he bade me farewell for the night, close by the portico of Licinius.

CHAPTER X.

IN the morning I found Licinius and his son extremely uneasy, in consequence of the absence of Xerophastes, who had not returned during the whole of the night ; but Sabinus came in while they were talking to me, and narrated, without hesitation, all we had seen and heard, both in the garden of Trajan and at the procession of the Galli. Young Sextus could scarcely be restrained by respect for his father from expressing, rather too openly, his satisfaction in the course which the affairs of the disappointed lady appeared to be taking ; while the orator himself muttered between his teeth words which I thought boded not much of good to the ambitious rhetorician. The centurion alone regarded all these things as matters of mere amusement, or so at least he seemed to regard them ; for, as I have already hinted, I was not without my suspicion that he was at bottom by no means well pleased with the contemplation of the future splendour of the stoic.

However, after many jests had been exchanged between Sextus and the centurion concerning this new-discovered and apparently very incongruous amour, Licinius said, he was in so far much relieved by what he had heard, as it satisfied him that both the widow and her lover were now otherwise occupied than in prosecuting their designs against the niece of his friend Capito.

"I myself," he continued, "was all yesterday, as well as the day before, exerting every means in my power for her extrication from this unfortunate confinement. Cotilius, without question, has indeed been a traitor ;

but I believe the prince himself is, by this time, well inclined to absolve, not only the young lady, but by far the greater part of those who were taken with her, from any participation in his traitorous and unworthy designs. The charge, however, of which it rests with themselves alone to exculpate themselves, is one of a nature so serious that it is impossible to contemplate, without much anxiety, the pain to which so many families—above all, the noble and excellent Sempronii—may still, it is but too probable, be exposed. But this day Cotilius will, in all likelihood, pay the last penalty of *his* crimes—and then we shall see what intercession may avail. Would to Heaven there were any one could obtain access to the deluded lady, and prevail with her to do that which would be more effectual than I can hope any intercession to prove.”

I shook my head, and Licinius understood well the meaning of the gesture. “My dear Valerius,” said he, “I am afraid your apprehensions are indeed far from being groundless. This infatuation—this dream—this madness—is, indeed, a just source of fear; and yet, why should we suppose its sway to be already so deeply confirmed in a breast so young, so ingenuous, so full, according to every report, of every thing modest, gentle, and submissive? Surely this amiable, affectionate girl cannot be insensible to the affliction of those who love her the best. But you still shake your head, Valerius; well, it is in our hands to do what we can; as for the issue, who can hope to divert Trajan from doing that which he believes to be just? Our best hope is in his justice—”

“And in his clemency,” interrupted the centurion; —“yes, yes, and in his clemency; you will scarcely persuade me that Cesar can meditate any thing serious concerning an innocent young girl, who has been guilty of nothing but a little superstition and enthusiasm. Nobody will confound her case with that of any obstinate old fanatic. Great Jove! it is not to be believed but that she shall have many happy days yet, to see the nonsense of all these Jewish visions, and to forget them. In the mean time, what avails it to distress ourselves

more than is necessary? Licinius is able to do something, and he will do whatever he can; and as for Valerius, it is my humble opinion that the best thing he can do is to get on horseback and go with Sextus and myself to the river-side, where the emperor is to review this morning the two cohorts that have just arrived from Calabria. They say they are in fine condition, and I have several old comrades among them, whom I have not seen for these three years."

Young Sextus, who was on all occasions very fond of military spectacles, embraced with gladness this proposal of the ever-active centurion; and very fain would they both have prevailed on me to accede to it likewise. I knew, however, that it would be impossible, if I accompanied them, to keep my appointment with the old Christian; and that I was resolved on no account to forego. I told them, therefore, that I must needs spend the morning in writing to my friends in Britain; and so retired to my chamber, there to await the approach of the hour at which I had made promise to be in the Forum. I spent the time till it drew near in perusing once more (which I now did with greater composure and reflection, but with no diminution either of interest or admiration) the volume which had been given to me by Thraso, and restored to me again by Athanasia. This volume, and the letter which I have before mentioned, I placed together in my bosom, before I went forth into the city.

I entered the Forum, and found it, as formerly, thronged with multitudes of busy litigants and idle spectators. A greater concourse, indeed, than was usual, crowded, not it only, but all the avenues to it, and all the neighbouring streets, by reason of a solemn embassy from the Parthian, which was to have audience of Trajan that day, in presence of the Senate. The rumour of this oriental pageant (for it was noised abroad that the ambassadors brought many splendid gifts in their train) had attracted the loungers of the baths and porticoes of the Palatine, and all were waiting for the moment when the prince should return from the Martian Field, with the newly arrived cohorts, and take his place

in the temple of Concord, where the Parthians were to be received. But I, for my part, had no sooner discovered the statue of Numa Pompilius than I resolved to abide close by it, lest, being mingled in the tumult of the expecting multitudes, I should, by any mischance, escape the notice of the old man, who, I doubted not, meant to seek me there in person. The time, however, went on—senator after senator entered the portico of the temple—and at last the shouts of the people announced that Trajan himself had arrived there. And immediately after he had gone in, the stately pomp of the Parthian embassy appeared in view, and every eye was fixed upon the long line of slaves, laden with cloth of gold and rich merchandise, and upon the beautiful troop of snow-white horses, which pawed the ground, in magnificent caparisons, before the gate of the Senate-house. But when the trumpets had blown a salute, which I understood to signify that the ambassadors themselves drew near, and all were yet more earnestly intent upon the spectacle, I observed a little fair-haired girl standing over-against me, by the base of the statue, who, after looking at me for some moments, came close to me, and said, with great modesty, “Sir, if you be Caius Valerius, I pray you follow me, and I shall bring you to the friend whom you have expected.”

I signified that I was the man she sought, and that I was prepared to attend her; and then the little girl cast her eyes upward on the left-hand, where the cliff and towers of the Capitol overlook the edifices of the Forum. My eyes instantly followed the direction of hers, and I saw, high up in one of the overhanging towers, a white handkerchief waved once and again from a window. My companion held up her right hand, I could not help thinking as if in answer to this signal; but she said nothing, and I walked by her side in silence. We proceeded between the arches, and so up the hanging stairs, and, in a word, had soon reached the level of the Capitol, from whence, looking back, I could perceive the whole array of the forensic multitudes far below me, and hear the noise of their shouting, quite softened by the distance. The child paused with me for a moment at the summit

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of the ascent, and then, still saying nothing, conducted me across two magnificent squares, and round about the great temple of Jupiter, until, at length, she stopped at one of the side-doors of an edifice, which, from the manner in which it was guarded, I already suspected to be the great prison, which is also called the Mammertine.

The girl knocked, and he who kept the gate, saluting her cheerfully, allowed us to pass without question into the interior of the prison. My companion then took a key from her girdle, and herself opening a door on the right-hand of the inner court, tripped before me along many passages, and up many stairs, till we reached at length a part of the building which was arranged in such a manner that I could with difficulty believe it to belong to a place of confinement and punishment. She ushered me into a convenient antechamber, and then left me, saying, "Sit down, sir, if it please you, and I will tell my father that you are come."

The little damsel had not been gone above a minute or two, ere a door, different from that by which I had come into the chamber, was opened, and the old priest (whose name, if I have not before mentioned it, was Aurelius Felix) entered, along with a mild-looking man of middle age, whom he desired me to salute as the keeper of the prison, saying, "Here, Valerius, is that Silo of whom yesterday evening you spake with so great admiration. But I hope the benevolence of a Christian will ere long cease to be an object of so much wonder in your eyes."

"My father," said the jailer, "methinks you yourself say too much about such little things. But, in the mean time, let us ask Valerius if he has heard any thing of what has been determined by Cesar."

I answered by telling what I had just heard from Licinius; upon which the countenance of the old man was not a little lightened; but Silo fixed his eyes upon the ground, and, I thought, seemed to regard the matter very seriously. He said, however, after a pause, "So far, at least, it is well. Let us hope that the calumnies which have been detected may turn more and more of discredit upon those who have gone abroad con-

cerning that which is dearer to you, my father, and to all your true companions, than any thing of what men call their own. But, alas ! these, after all, are but poor tidings for us to carry to our dear young lady."

"Fear not," answered Aurelius ; "have I not told you already oftentimes, that strength of heart goes not with bone and sinew, and that my gentle child is prepared for all things ? She also well knows that the servant is not greater than his master."

So saying, the old man motioned to us to remain where we were, and withdrew again by the same door at which he had entered. I sat for some minutes by the side of Silo, who continued to look downward, and who was, indeed, manifestly much troubled by the news which I had brought. After a space, he arose and walked very dejectedly back and forward in my presence, but still said not a word, until at length the same modest little damsel opened the door by which the old priest had departed, and said, "Father, Aurelius is in the lady's chamber, and he desired me to bring Valerius."

The father, smiling mournfully upon his child, pointed to me as if to bid me follow her, and I prepared to do so ; but he himself continued where he was, still walking to and fro, as if lost in meditation.

The child led me, therefore, into the adjoining chamber, and tapped gently at a door on the other side of it. The voice of the old priest bade us come in, and Athanasia, who had been sitting by his side, arose with him to receive me. She was dressed in a simple white tunic, her hair was braided in dark folds upon her forehead, her countenance was calm, and, but for the paleness of her lips, and a certain something that was just visible in her eyes, I should have said that her gravity scarcely partook of sadness. When, however, we had exchanged our salutations, it was evident that some effort had been necessary for all this appearance of serenity ; for her voice trembled when she spoke to me,—yes, her voice trembled in every tone, and, as she stooped to caress my young guide, who had sat down by her feet upon the ground, I saw the tear that had been gathering drop

heavily, and lose itself among the bright clusters of the little damsel's hair.

The girl, in the mean time, perceiving nothing of Athanasia's trouble, continued to play with a linnet which sat upon her finger, and to imitate, after her childish fashion, the notes of the bird. From time to time she turned round, as if to attract the lady's notice to the beauty of her favourite, and lifted upward her smiling eyes, the pure azure of which reflected the careless glee of innocence. But at length another and another drop fell full upon the cheek of the damsel, and then she looked upward more steadily, and seeing that, in truth, Athanasia wept, her own eyes began immediately to overflow with the ready tears of childhood. Athanasia pressed the girl to her bosom, and made one struggle more—but it would not do—for her heart was running to the brim, and, at last, with one passionate sob, all the sluices gave way, and she was dissolved at once in a flood of weeping. I took her unresisting hand, and imitated as best I could the language of consolation—which, alas ! I had not to give. But it seemed as if my poor whispers only served to increase the misery they were meant to still. She stooped, and covered her face with her hands, and sobs and tears were mingled together, and the blood glowed red in her neck, in the deep agony of her lamentation.

I looked round, and saw that the old priest was moved at first scarcely less than myself by all this sorrowful sight. Yet the calmness of age deserted him not long, and after a moment there remained nothing on his countenance but the gravity and the tenderness of compassion. He arose from his seat, and without saying a single word either to Athanasia or to myself, walked quietly towards the end of the apartment, from which when he returned, after a brief space, there was an ancient volume held open in his hand. Still, without addressing us, the old man resumed his seat, which was right over-against the disconsolate maiden, and immediately, in a voice touched—and but touched—with tremour, he began to read aloud, in the Greek tongue, words which were then new, and which have ever since

been in a peculiar manner dear to me. You, my friends, know them well; and surely none are to be found in all the Scriptures more beautiful than those sacred words of the royal poet of the Hebrews:—

“God,” said the old man, and his voice gained strength from every word as he uttered it,—“God is our refuge and strength: a very present help in trouble.

“Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed; though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

“Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled;

“Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”

Athanasia took her hands from her face, and gradually composing herself, looked through her tears upon the old man as he proceeded.

“There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God;

“The holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High;

“God is in the midst of her.

“She shall not be moved;

“God shall help her, and that right early.

“The heathen raged; the kingdoms were moved;

“He uttered his voice; the earth melted.

“The Lord of Hosts is with us;

“The God of Jacob is our refuge.”

The blood had mounted high in the countenance of Aurelius, and his voice had become strong and full, ere he reached these last words of triumphant confidence. The tears also had been all dried up on the pale cheek of Athanasia; and although her voice was not heard, I saw that her lips moved fervently along with those of the fervent priest. Even in me, who knew not well from whence they proceeded, the words of the royal prophet produced I know not what of buoyance and of emotion, and perhaps my lips, too, had involuntarily essayed to follow them; for when he paused from his reading, the old man turned to me with a face full of benignity, and said, “Yes, Valerius, it is even so; Homer, Pindar, Æschylus—these, indeed, can stir the

blood ; but it is such poetry as this that alone can sooth in sorrow, and strengthen in the hour of tribulation. Your vain-glorious Greeks called all men barbarians but themselves ; and yet these words, and thousands not less precious than these, consoled the afflictions, and ennobled the triumphs of the chosen people of the race of Israel long, long years ere ever the boasted melody of Ionian or Doric verses had been heard of. From this alone, young man, you may judge what measure of candour inhabits along with the disdain of our proud enemies,—how fairly, without question, or opportunity of defence, the charge of barbarity is heaped upon what they are pleased to call our *superstition*,—how wisely the learned and the powerful of the earth have combined in this league against the truth which they know not,—of which they fear or despise the knowledge.” The old man paused for a moment, and then laying his hand upon the volume that was open before him, and casting his eyes upward, said, in a deep and earnest whisper, “Surely the truth is mighty, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.”

“But, alas ! my dear father,” said Athanasia, “I fear me this is not the place, nor the situation, in which Valerius might be most likely to listen to your words. It may be that his own narrow escape, to say nothing of our present danger, has rendered him even more cautious than he was before.”

“And who, my dear child,” he replied hastily,—“and who is he that shall dare to blame caution, or to preach, above all in such things as these, the rashness that is of folly ? No, no ; Valerius will not believe that we, like the miserable creatures whose impious songs we heard last night together, are studious only of working upon the fears of the ignorant, and harassing, with dark and lying dreams, the imaginations of the simple. Here” (he laid his hand once more upon the sacred volume)—“*here* are no wild stories of blood-thirsty deities and self-sacrificing maniacs. *Here* all is plain—clear—perspicuous. *Here* is that which Socrates vainly sought by all the ingenuity of reason. *Here* is that of which some faint and mysterious anticipations

would appear to have been shadowed forth in the sublime obscurity of the visions of Plato. *Here* is that which, as that mighty martyr who died in this very city hath said, innumerable prophets and kings of the old time desired to see, and yet saw not. Do nothing rashly, young man ; but it is possible, as you yourself well know, that this may be the last opportunity I shall ever have of speaking with you ; and therefore, before we part, I must needs charge you solemnly, that henceforth you are not one of those who are altogether ignorant ; and that if your knowledge increase not, the sin shall be upon your head. I charge you, Valerius" (he rose from his seat as he spoke), "I charge you, that when you return once more to your native island you blot not out from your memory the things that you have seen and heard in this great city of light and darkness. Examine—judge—ask aid, and aid shall not be refused you—but I charge you, as your soul is precious, I charge you once more, young man, neither to overlook in carelessness, nor to reject in rashness. I take Athanasia to witness for me, that I have given you the warning that is needful."

"Oh, sir !" said Athanasia, "I am sure it shall not be in vain that you have done so. I am sure Valerius will never forget this hour—"

She gazed in my face as she said so, and a tear was again visible, dimming the clear dark crystal of her eye, yet on all her countenance there was no other semblance of passion ; all besides was calm, serene, heroic ; one lucid drop alone was there to tinge the majesty of resignation with the human grace of melancholy. The venerable Aurelius looked upon her with the pride and the pity of a father, and clasping his old thin hands together, whispered (for I think he had no power to say it more aloud), "Would to God that I were here alone ! Shall the axe be laid to the root of the fair young tree that hath but begun to blossom, when so many old trunks stand around withered by the lightnings, and sore broken by the winds ! The will of the Lord be done."

"Amen ! amen !" said Athanasia, taking the old man by the hand, and smiling, I think, more cheerfully than

I had yet seen her. "My dear father," she continued, "I fear you yourself, after all, are teaching Valerius to take but a sad farewell of us."

"Alas ! my child," he replied, "he must have a hard heart who could look unmoved on that sweet face in this hour of sadness. But cheer up, my child, we must not forget that we are in the hands of a greater than Trajan. If so it please Him, all may yet go well with us even here upon the earth. You may live to see many happy years among your kindred ; and I" (the old man smiled most serenely)—"and for me, my gray hairs may be laid in bloodless dust. Once more, my noble maiden, the will of the Lord be done. God forbid that we should be choosers for ourselves ; whatever cup awaits us, blessed be the name of the Lord !"

So saying, the old man retired from the chamber, and once more I was left alone in the presence of Athanasia. I took from my bosom the book and letter which I had placed there, and laid them on her knee. She broke the seal, and read hastily what Thraso had written, and then concealed the scroll within her tunic, saying, "Alas ! Valerius, little did the brave old soldier suspect how soon his peril was to be mine ; will you permit me like him to make you my messenger ? will you seek out my cousin, my sister, and tell Sempronia in what condition you have found me ?—no, not in what you found—but in what you now see me. Will you go, Valerius, and speak comfort to my poor friend ? Her pity, at least, I am sure is mingled with no angry thoughts ; and yet she only has reason to complain, for her secret thoughts were not hid from me, and alas ! I concealed mine from her."

"I have already seen her," said I, "and you do her no more than justice. But, indeed, Sempronius himself thinks of you even as gently as his daughter."

"I doubt it not, Valerius ; but alas ! there are many others besides these ; and I know not what relic of weakness it is, but methinks I could have borne the worst more easily, had it not been for what I picture to myself of their resentment. The priestess—dread that priestess—Alas ! I am cut off for ever from the memory of my kindred."

"Weep not again," said I, "if you pity me, weep not. Oh, Athanasia! why did you save me from the sword of that Cotilius? Miserable day, that I first opened my eyes upon Rome; and, oh! most miserable hour, that first—"

"Nay, nay," she interrupted me; "lament not that which is past, and which never can be recalled." In saying so, she walked towards the window of the apartment, and I followed her footsteps. She threw open the lattice, as if that she might inhale the free air, and her eyes wandered to and fro over all the magnificent prospect that lay stretched out below us—the temples and high porticoes of the Forum—the gleaming battlements and long arcades of the Palatine—the baths, and theatres, and circuses between—and the river—yellow Tiber, winding away among the fields and groves, far beyond the blue ridges of the silent hills—and the clear sky of Italy extending over all things its beaming arch of splendour. We were far above the Forum, and when the trumpets were blown by the gate of the Senate-house, the sound floated upward to us as gently as if it had been borne over the waters. The shouts of the multitude were heard echoed and faintly re-echoed from the towers and the rocks. The princely pageant showed like a pomp of pigmies; spear, and helmet, and eagle glittered together almost like dews upon the distant herbage. Athanasia looked and listened for a moment, and then rested her eye once more upon the wide range of the champaign, where green fields and dark forests were spread out in interminable succession, away towards the northern region and the visible mountains. She raised her hand, and pointed to the verge of the horizon, and said to me, "Valerius, your home lies far away yonder. I must give you something which you shall promise me to carry with you to Britain—and preserve there, in memory—in memory—of Rome."

Before I had time to make any answer, she had turned from me, and taken out of a casket that stood upon the table beside which she had been sitting, a scroll of parchment, bound with a silk riband, which she imme-

diately put into my hands, and, "To-morrow," said she, "Valerius, our fate, they tell us, must at length be determined; if we share the fate of Thraso, the last gift of Thraso shall be yours. If, however, any mercy be extended to us, I cannot part with that memorial of a dying martyr. I must keep to myself the old man's favourite volume, for it was for me he had designed it. But, in the mean time, you see that I have taken care that you shall not be a loser. I have made a copy of the same book for yourself. I have written it since I came hither, Valerius, and you must not despise it because the Mammertine has not furnished the finest of materials. Take this, Valerius, and take it with my thanks—my prayers. I know you will not forget my message to my dear sister. Sextus and she—may many happy days be theirs—and yours."

I kissed the sad gift, and placed it in my bosom.

"Valerius," she said, "dear Valerius, you weep, you weep; now dry up your tears, Caius, for I cannot bear to see you weep. You weep for me because I am a Christian; but forget not that the old Roman blood flows in my veins, and think not that its current is chilled, because I have foresworn the worship of idol and demon, and am in peril for the service of The Living God. You think I am but an enthusiastic girl, not knowing either what I have left or what I have embraced, and you pity me as a victim of ignorance—"

"God forbid," said I; "I weep for you, Athanasia, but not for you alone. Alas! here is no time for ceremony, and silence breaks my heart—I love you, Athanasia; you know that I love you, and yet you tear my heart-strings by speaking to me as if I were a stranger. Lady," said I, for the first effort was every thing, "you must forgive me—you must pardon me. Had the world gone fairly, I know not when I should have dared to say such things to you; I know not if I ever should have dared. But now—nay, look not so calmly upon me, for that is worst of all—*now*, alas! what avails it whether I keep the ways of the world, or desert them utterly, as all fair hopes have deserted me? I ask nothing—I hope nothing—but I could not bear to part from you thus, and

not to tell you that when I part from you, I bid farewell to all things. Pardon me—once more pardon me.”

Athanasia kept her eye upon me quite steadfastly, while I poured out these wild words ; but her hand was placed in mine all the while, and I felt it cold and trembling. A single flush of crimson passed over her face, and then that too was as pale as marble, and I saw her lips move, but the syllables died ere they were uttered. She continued for a moment gazing so, and pale and trembling ; and then at last she fell upon my bosom and wept, not audibly, but I felt her tears.

My Athanasia was still folded to my bosom, in that strange agony of sorrow and of confidence, when Silo the jailer entered the apartment, abrupt and breathless.

“ Oh, sir !” said he, “ your sufferings are mine ; but it is necessary that you should leave us, and on the instant, for the prefect is already at the gate, and unquestionably he will examine every part of the prison ; and should you be recognised as the person who was taken in the monument, you see plainly to what suspicions it might give rise. Come then, sir, and let me secure your escape ; we shall take care to warn you of whatever occurs, and we shall send for you, if there be opportunity.”

Athanasia recovered herself almost instantly when she heard what Silo said.

“ We shall meet again,” said I.

“ At least once more,” replied she, “ at least once more, Valerius.”

And I tore myself away from her ; and the jailer having once again committed me to the guidance of his child, I was in a few moments conducted to the same postern by which I had been introduced. In a word, I found myself in the court of the Capitol at the instant when the prefect, with all his attendants, was entering by the main gate of the Mammertine.

The day was by this time considerably advanced, and I hastened homeward, in hopes of finding Licinius and having some conversation with him in private before the hour of supper. When I reached his house, however, I was told that he was still absent ; and found at the same time a billet upon the table, which informed

me that Sabinus had carried Sextus with him to his quarters, and that both expected I would join them there immediately upon my return. I knew not how to refuse compliance, and yet I could not bear the thought of being so far from the Capitol, in case of any message being sent to me from the prison. Since I could do no better, however, I charged Boto to remain in my apartment till sunset, and bring me, without delay, any letter or messenger that might arrive in my absence. Should none such appear within that space, I gave him a note, which I desired him to deliver into the hands of Silo; and having, as I thought, furnished him with sufficient directions how to discharge this commission, I myself took the path to the Prætorian camp, where I was sure at least of kindness, if not of consolation.

You will wonder, indeed, when I tell you, what is nevertheless most true, that I felt less need of consolation at that moment than I had done at any one time during the several busy and unhappy days that had just passed over my head. In vain should I seek to explain to you from what strange mysterious workings of my mind it came to be so. Divine them if you can—think of me as you please—but there were moments in which, as I walked along towards the residence of Sabinus, I felt—yes, in spite of all the darkness that surrounded the fate of my Athanasia—I felt as if some new light had streamed upon my path—as if some weight of intolerable lead had been lifted from my bosom—as if a heart dry and parched had been suddenly plunged in some current of life and refreshment—as if sorrow had faded into a phantom, and my lips had been taught some secret irresistible charm, by which the envious shade could for ever be chased into darkness.

No, I speak rashly; I paint it brighter than it was. There was still upon me the sense of something cold, black, grasping; I could not forget for a moment that reality lay frowning around me; fear hung over me like an evil bird, with wide, strong, hovering wings; gulfs lay open before me—deep gulfs, from which my eye turned like a coward. Yet all was not darkness—all was not heaviness. Despair was not. A beam—a

healing beam had penetrated the thick gloom of the tempest—a rainbow hung glittering in calm brightness athwart the blackest places of the heaven—one pure azure spot gleamed steadily between the darkness of the lowering clouds. I knew that Athanasia loved me—utter misery could no longer be mine—I had no right to be miserable. Death itself could not dry up the tears that had been shed upon my bosom. O the pride and the inalienable happiness of youthful love! No affliction, no terror has power to take away its buoyancy of blessedness; the memory of it is the inexhaustible treasure of the soul; the vision of young tenderness hovers day and night before the dim eye of age; and Hope and Faith sit like two white-robed angels by the restoring tomb.

CHAPTER XI.

STRANGE as all this may appear to you, it was therefore with (comparatively speaking) something of a lightened heart that I passed along the Mounds of Tarquin, beyond which, as I have already told you, the Prætorian camp is situated. When I drew near to the camp itself, and came within sight of the guard-house where I had visited Thraso, and of the old fig-tree beneath which I had recognised Athanasia, it is true, the darker picture prevailed for a moment over all the light I had been able to see, or to fancy. Nevertheless, even these sad memorials could not effectually compete with the natural elements of hope that were so strong within me; and even Sabinus, who was by no means the closest of observers, said, the moment I entered his apartment, that he was quite sure I had heard good news of my lawsuit; or else, he added in a whisper, of some affair almost as interesting to me.

When I told him, in reply to this, where I had been,

and in what condition I had left Athanasia, the countenance of the good-natured centurion immediately fell, and he said, "Well, my dear Caius, I am glad to see that you have at least learned one good thing since you came to Rome; and that is, not to let your face lie open like a text-book, for every booby to read your thoughts upon. Let us hope, however, my dear boy, that you may not long have occasion for putting any such lessons in practice—at least not in the way you are now doing. To-night or to-morrow we shall certainly know the best or the worst of it; and in the mean time, you must play the soldier among soldiers, and remember that Anacreon is your only true camp oracle."

He concluded the sentence with one of his usual whistles, in which there was perhaps more of hilarity than of music; and, beating time with his heel upon the ground, chanted the merry lines of the Teian reprobate,—

"To-morrow comes! while here I sit,
What have I to do with it?"

A gray-haired tribune, with one eye, and a thin yellow face, seamed all over with wrinkles, walked, or rather halted, into the room at that moment, and took the strain out of the mouth of the jolly centurion,—squeaking very dolefully,—

"Why, oh why, when joy is here—
When the sky is bright and clear—
Why be dreaming about sorrow,
And clouds that come not till to-morrow?"

After having quavered with an air of great self-satisfaction upon the last note of which, the old gentleman said, "Come, Sabinus, there is no time to be lost; there is to be such a crowd to-day, that if you wish your friends to sit near the master of the feast, you had better adjourn to the Julius; I looked into the kitchen as I came along."

"Of course you did, tribune," interrupted Sabinus, laughing.

"I looked into the kitchen," he proceeded, "and you

may laugh, if you please, at the news I have to tell you, but, by the genius of Trajan, I never saw such a boar since I was born. By Jove, what firmness! what a beautiful brown! 'tis a most illustrious boar!"

"You speak like a very Antony," quoth the centurion; "but come, boys, since it is so, I know not why we should linger. I am glad that the camp is not to be disgraced by the supper—and as to the wine—I say nothing—but I believe, tribune, we can show them something."

So saying, these two commanders led us into the great banquetting-room, where several of those high-fed warriors who had more than once disposed of the empire were already reclining upon rich couches around the board on which this tusked charmer was expected to make his appearance. Sextus and I obeyed the directions of our host, and took our places, not without some feelings of humility, in the presence of those lordly personages, whose effeminate exterior would, perhaps, have made them less formidable in my eyes, had I not remembered the youth of the great Cæsar, the Parthian retreat of Antony, and the recent death of Otho.*

There were present, besides these luxurious soldiers, a few casual visitors like ourselves, who seemed quite as fond of good eating as any of the rest; among others, a sleek Flamen, who reclined on the right-hand of the presiding tribune, and a little bald Greek, who seemed to think it incumbent upon himself to fill up every pause in the conversation by malicious anecdotes or sarcasms, of which last it was easy to see that the Flamen opposite to him was frequently the subject. That sacred character, on his part, so long as the supper lasted, did not appear to give himself much trouble about any thing the Greek chose to say; his eye seldom wandered from his cover, unless when it was in search of some particular sauce or condiment; and if he interrupted his eating now and then, it was only for the purpose of sipping a little out of a certain richly-chased goblet, that stood within easy reach of his fingers. The Greek, on the other hand, became every

* ———Catonem

Novisti moriens vincere, mollis Otho, &c.

moment more and more free in his remarks, and even hazarded a few jokes, which it was impossible not to consider as extremely irreligious in their tendency. Neither wit nor impiety, however, could make any impression upon the smooth-faced Flamen, who seemed to think, if one might judge from his behaviour, that the most acceptable service he could render to the deities was to do full and devout justice to the gifts of their benevolence. There was so much of seriousness in the good man's style, both of eating and of drinking, that one could scarcely suspect him of being actuated by feelings of a less dignified nature. The scene, nevertheless, appeared to furnish infinite amusement to the spectators; above all, to that extremely fat and short-necked commander who acted as master of the revels,—who laughed so heartily every now and then, that his face looked black rather than purple, and that I could not help thinking there was some ground for what I heard whispered more than once among some of his juniors. Perhaps I need scarcely add, that the word *apoplexy* was one of those I overheard.

A very animated discussion concerning the newly-arrived cohorts (which, I have told you, had taken place that morning by the river-side) relieved for some time the patient Flamen from the attacks of this irreverent person, and engaged the zealous participation of those who had hitherto been the most silent of the company. Sabinus, among the rest, was ready with a world of remarks upon the equipments, the manœuvres, the merits and the demerits of the troops in question; but something he said was quite at variance with the sentiments of one of his brother centurions, who disputed with him rather warmly than successfully, for a few moments, and at last ended with saying, “But why should I take so much trouble to discuss the matter with you, who, we all know, were thinking of other matters, and saw not much more of the review than if you had been a hundred miles off from it?”

The centurion coloured a little, and laughed, as it seemed to me, with rather less heartiness than usual; but the disputant, pursuing his advantage, said, “Yes, yes, you may laugh if you will; but do you think we are all blind, or do you suppose we are not acquainted with certain

particulars? Well, some people dislike the Suburra, but for my part, I agree with Sabinus; I think it is one of the genteeldest places in Rome, and that there are some of the snuggest houses in it too; and if old men will die—for me, I protest, I don't see why young men should not succeed them."

The centurion laughed again, and natural ruddiness of complexion was, I thought, scarcely quite sufficient to account for the flush on his countenance, as he listened to these inuendoes. But the master of the feast cut the matter short, by saying that he had a health to propose, and that he expected all present should receive it with honour.—"Here," said he, "is to the fair Lady Rubellia, who is never absent when the Prætorians turn out; and may all things fair and fortunate attend her now and hereafter."

I pledged the toast, as in duty bound, and whispered to Sabinus, "My friend, I think you have really some reason for blushing. Oh, fy! to go and make table-talk of it so immediately. If you had no pity on Xerophrates, you might at least have had some pity for the pretty widow."

He made no answer to this, and looked, if possible, more confused than ever; but, just at that moment, a soldier came in, and delivered a billet to the presiding tribune, who handed it to Sabinus immediately after he had read it, and said, loud enough to be heard by all those who sat near him, "I wish the prince would give some of this work to these new comers. But, indeed, I wonder what lictors are good for nowadays. I think the Prætorians might be spared such jobs as this; but every thing that these Christians are any way concerned in seems to be a matter of importance."

Sabinus, having read the billet, handed it back again to the tribune, and said, "So *exit* Cotilius!—well, and so we must play the chorus to the falling of his curtain."

The tribune shrugged his shoulders, whispered something into the ear of the messenger, and then, dashing more wine into his cup, said, "By Jove, it is my most humble opinion, that Rome will never be a quiet place,

nor the Prætorian helmet a comfortable head-piece, till these barbarians be extirpated."

The Flamen tossed off a full goblet, and smiting with his hand upon the table, said, "There spake a true Roman, and a worshipper of the gods. I rejoice to find that there is still some religion in the world; for, what with skulking Jews on the one hand, and bold blasphemous Cyrenæans on the other, so help me Jupiter, the general prospect is dark enough!"

"In my opinion," quoth the bald Greek, putting on an air of some gravity, and staring the Flamen full in the face, "in my humble opinion, the Jews will have the better of the Cyrenæans. Indeed, I should not be much surprised to see this Christian superstition supplant every other."

The Flamen half-started from his seat, and opened his eyes as if rage had half-strangled him: but his wrath was speechless, and he sat down again to devour it.

"You observe, gentlemen," proceeded the Greek, in a tone of the most perfect composure, "you observe what great advantage any new superstition has over any thing of the same sort that is old. We all know, for example, that Isis and Cybele have for many years past left comparatively few worshippers to Mars, Apollo,—even to Jupiter."

The Flamen, with a face on fire, twisted himself on his seat. The Greek perceived that he had at last touched him in a tender place, and, conveying additional solemnity into his visage, pursued his triumph.

"It is, indeed, most melancholy, most lamentable," quoth he; "but it is nevertheless most true. I have heard that, unless upon some very great day, a gift is now quite a rarity upon the altar of any of the true ancient deities of Rome. Egypt and Mont Ida have done this; and, upon my word, I don't see why Palestine should not succeed as well as either of them; for I suppose cant and buffoonery are pretty much the same things all the world over. In the mean time, the enlightened contemplate every different manifestation of the superstitious principle with equal indifference; and, I confess to you, I have been a little surprised to perceive how far Trajan is from

imitating their example. But that Chæronæan master of his, that Plutarch, was always a perfect old woman ; and I fear the prince has not been able to shake off the impression of his ridiculous stories. They say, the old proser has become a priest himself (I forget of what deity) since he returned to his village. It were well if he contented himself with imposing upon those rustics ; but it is rather too much to think of such a person having any influence with the master of the empire—and such a master, too, as Trajan !”

“ Hush, hush !” quoth the master of the day, “ you forget in what company you are ; and besides, if it please you, you must remember that nothing can be said here against either Trajan or his friends ; and as for Plutarch, let me tell you, I remember Plutarch very well ; and he was—whatever you may say of him—he was one of the pleasantest fellows that I ever met with.”

“ I doubt it not—I doubt it not,” cried the Greek, perceiving that he had carried the thing too far.

“ You doubt it not, sir ?” quoth the Flamen at length, recovering the use of his tongue : “ I am glad, I assure you, that there is any thing you don’t doubt. But answer me one thing, Master Believer, do you believe that your body and your soul are made of the same clay ? do you believe there is any after-state, in which the faults of the *now* shall be corrected ?”

“ My dear Flamen,” answered he, relapsing into his old tone, “ I suppose you don’t yourself believe that every thing is as well as it might be ?”

“ No, sir,” quoth the other, very shortly, “ I believe no such thing ; and I never was less inclined to believe it, I promise you.”

“ The day may come, then,” resumed the bald man, with an air of great sagacity, “ the day may come when Falernian shall sparkle ready for drinking in the rivers—when thrushes shall hop about the trees broiled and trussed—and when man—perfected being !—shall say to the lamprey hissing in the pan, ‘ My friend, I think that side of you will do now ; pray turn round, if it please you ; and do you, mellow offspring of the olive, take care you don’t let him stick to the brass.’ Gentlemen, the Flamen

and I are, after all, you see, quite as one as to these matters."

The younger Prætorians laughed heartily along with the satirical Greek ; but the Flamen looked deadly pale for rage, and held his lips so firmly together, that I suppose he wished us to see he would have thought it profanation for him to address one word more to such a person as this scoffer. Sabinus alone appeared desirous of restoring the harmony of the assembly, and called forthwith on the same musical brother who had come into his apartment before supper, to join him in entertaining the company with a song. The old gentleman required much solicitation, and said fifty times over that he was a little hoarse ; but, nevertheless, he was audibly clearing his throat all the while, and he at last announced his consent to attempt the singing of the female part in the beautiful duet of Horace and Lydia. Sabinus, on his part, was always ready with the best he could do ; and accordingly began to roar out, without hesitation, in his usual boisterous fashion, the tender words of regret and expostulation, which the most elegant of poets has ascribed to himself. The delicate half-squeaking, half-murmuring response of the wrinkled representative of the inconstant Lydia afforded a contrast irresistibly ludicrous to the rough guard-house vociferation of the ever jovial Sabinus. But to the ill-suppressed mirth of the party my good-natured friend listened with the most perfect composure. He had turned the thoughts of his comrades into a new channel, which was all he had wished to do ; and nothing could afflict him less than the idea that he had accomplished his benevolent purpose at the expense of being a little laughed at. He concluded, however, with proposing a bumper to the charming Lydia ; and so, it must be confessed, continued to leave the best part of the burden on the shoulders of his companion.

All, in short, were once more in perfect good humour, when another soldier appeared behind the couch of the president, and handed to him what seemed to be another billet of the same complexion with the former one. He tossed the paper as before to my friend, who changed colour, and looked very serious as he read it. He looked

to me very earnestly, as he was about to return it, and I could not help asking him if it was any thing that concerned me.

"My dear Caius," he said in a whisper, "now do not alarm yourself—for, after all, it may be nothing ; but an additional guard is ordered to the Palatine, and the reason is said to be, that the rest of the Christian prisoners are to be examined by the emperor himself."

"And when—for the sake of Heaven!—when, Sabinus?"

"Now, now—this very evening—an hour hence. For Heaven's sake, compose yourself, my dear boy. Would you retire to my apartment?"

I mastered myself as well as I could, and resolved, if possible, not to quit the room so very abruptly. I told Sextus, however, what I had heard, and desired him not to be astonished if I should ere long make my escape. The poor boy shared visibly in all my agitation ; but I had scarcely had a moment to compose myself, when one of the slaves who were in attendance whispered to me that a person wished to speak with me in the ante-chamber. Sabinus insisted upon accompanying me—Sextus did the same—and we all three, having made our excuses, hastened to the hall, where my messenger was expecting me.

It was Dromo, and he stood panting for breath.

"Sir," said he, "I have no time for explanation. Silo wishes to see you, and instantly ; I left Boto along with him at the Mammertine."

"Run," said Sextus ; "let us run, my dear Caius. Sabinus and I will both go along with you."

"No, no," said Dromo ; "nobody must go along with him but myself—no one else can be of any use ; and as for the centurion, the guard is already waiting for him in the court."

"Ha!" said Sabinus, "so very speedily do they attend me? Run, then, run, my dear Valerius. I shall be at the Palatine on the instant ; and be sure I shall come to you the moment the watch is out. Run, and remember what I said to you. Forget not that you are a man, and a Roman."

So saying, the centurion took his sword and helmet, and before Dromo and I were beyond the precincts of the camp, we saw him mounted, and at the head of his squadron. They passed us a few yards beyond the gate, and although we pursued them hastily, the beat of hoofs and the ring of armour were soon far beyond our hearing.

CHAPTER XII.

MOVING at this rapid pace, we had come within sight of the towers of the Capitol, ere Dromo declared himself no longer able to sustain the same exertion.

"And after all," said he, looking to the west, from which the last blush of sunset had not yet entirely passed away, "after all, we shall be in good time. We shall find Silo and Boto still together; for the hour is not yet come at which the prisoners were ordered to the Palatine."

I made some inquiry why it was that Boto had not come to me himself, and received an explanation which I must give to you more briefly than Dromo gave it to me.

You must know, then, that Boto, mistrusting his own recollection of my instructions, had requested Dromo to assist him in finding his way to the Mammertine; and it was so that the Cretan had come to be witness of a scene which, in spite of all his sarcastic disposition, he could not narrate to me without many tokens of sympathy. I think I mentioned to you once before, that my faithful slave, in coming with me to Rome, had indulged the hope of meeting once more with his brother, who, many years before our journey took place, had been carried off from Britain in the train of a Roman officer of distinction. I smiled when the poor man expressed to me his ignorant confidence that his brother would certainly find him out, ere he had been many days in the metropolis of the world. But now, as it turned out, a fortunate accident had abundantly recompensed him for many hours of ill-regulated search. He had found his brother, and he had found him

in the Mammertine. In a word, the British bondsman had been one of the luckiest of men ; and the brother of my own slave was no other than that humane Silo, to whose kindness I, and one dearer to me than myself, had already been so deeply indebted. The Cretan, himself a slave, and an exile long banished from his kindred, described, in a tone of melancholy interest, a scene which, in itself, must have exhibited almost as much of sorrow as of joy. He had partaken in all the feelings of the long-lost brothers, and hastened to bring me from the Prætorian camp, that Boto might be spared the pain of immediately parting from him whom he had just found in a manner so unlooked for, and in a condition so far above his expectations. "And yet," said he, "I had some difficulty in prevailing on Boto to permit me to do this ; for, after his first transports were over, it seemed to be the most fervent wish of his heart to be able to tell you of his good fortune, and present to you his brother."

But I have no time at present to tell you more of what passed between me and the Cretan. The red tints of the western sky were every moment becoming faint and more faint, and I hurried along the darkening street, and up the ascent of the Capitoline, scarce listening to the story, which, at any other moment, I need not tell you would have commanded all my attention, and all my sympathy. We reached the summit, and found the magnificent courts and the temple of Jupiter already occupied by various detachments of mounted soldiers. I hastened, between their scattered groups, on to the gate of the Mammertine, and, at the moment when I had reached it, recognised, at some distance, the strong voice of Sabinus calling out, "Stand, Eagle ; comrades, close up !" The horn sounded as he spoke, as if in echo to the command, and, before the postern opened to admit us, the Prætorian squadron had formed themselves into a compact line, right over-against the great gate of the prison. I saw Sabinus take his place at the head of the array, and ran to speak to him. "My dear Caius," said he, stooping on his horse, "would to Heaven I had been spared this duty ! Cotilius comes forth this moment, and then we go back to the Palatine ; and I fear—I fear we are to guard

thither your Athanasia. If you wish to enter the prison, hasten your steps; and may you be stronger than you hope. Go, go, my dear boy," he added. "By Jove, I had rather pursue the Parthian!—but what must be, must." He squeezed my hand, and I hastened away from him. Dromo stood along with the door-keeper at the open postern, and we glided into the prison, which was now no longer silent, as I had found it in the morning, but resounding in all its courts and arches with bustle and hurry, and the noise of fatal preparation.

We had scarcely entered the inner court ere Sabinus also, and about a score of his Prætorians, rode into it by the main approach. Silo and Boto were standing together; and both had already hastened towards me; but the jailer, seeing the centurion, was constrained to part from me almost before I had time to take him by the hand, or to lift up my poor Boto, who, not I think without tears, had embraced my knees the instant he perceived me. His brother, however, who seemed scarcely less affected than he, attended not Sabinus till he had whispered a single word in my ear,—“Oh! sir, now, more than ever, how does all this torture me! Pity me, for I also am most wretched. But you know the way—here, take this key—hasten to the apartment, which you know—and oh! spare yourself at least the needless pain of witnessing this scene of blood, which—would to God it were the last—Oh! sir, let me not entreat you in vain; hasten to my dear lady, and tell her, for I have not the heart to do so, what commands have come to us from Trajan.”

Alas! said I to myself, of what tidings am I doomed ever to be the messenger!—but Athanasia was alone; and how could I shrink from any pain that might perhaps alleviate hers. I took the key the kind jailer offered me—I left the court, which was now blazing with the light of torches, and ringing with the muster of men and horses—I glided hastily along the dim corridors of the Mamertine, and stood once more at the door of the chamber in which I had parted from my Athanasia. No voice answered to my knock; I repeated it three times, and then, agitated with indistinct apprehension, hesitated no longer to open it. No lamp was burning within the chamber;

but through one of its two windows, both of which stood open to receive the mild air of the evening, there entered a wavering glare of deep saffron-coloured light, which showed me Athanasia extended on her couch, her head pillowed upon her left arm, and her right hand buried in the mazes of her dark hair, which lay loose and dishevelled upon her placid bosom. I say placid, for, fierce and unnatural as was the inconstant gleam that passed and repassed over her features, its ominous and troubled hue had no power to mar the image of her sleeping tranquillity. There lay she, her large serene eyelids closed in their calmness upon orbs that were so soon to be awakened upon all the fierceness of peril—all the gloom of terror. A smile—a sweet composed smile sat on her virgin lips, and her tunic scarce betrayed the modest heaving of her bosom. I hung over her for a moment, and was about—oh! how unwillingly—to disturb that slumber—perhaps that last slumber of peace and innocence—when the chamber-walls were visited with a broader and a yet deeper glare, and my footsteps, I know not by what instinct, were drawn half-unconsciously to the window by which the light had access.

“Caius, Caius,” she whispered, as I stepped from beside the couch; “why do you leave me, Valerius? stay, stay, my Valerius.”

I looked back, but her eyelids were still closed; the same calm smile was upon her dreaming lips. The light streamed redder and more red—all in an instant became as quiet without as within. I approached the open window, and saw Cotilius standing far below in the midst of the prison-court; the torches all around—the horsemen drawn up in silence on either side—and a single soldier close behind him, resting upon an unsheathed glittering sword, as in expectation of the signal.

Sabinus, meantime, who sat on horseback immediately over-against the prisoner, was stooping down and speaking with Silo; but ere I had looked for another moment he dismissed the jailer, and I saw him nod to the trumpeter, who immediately lifted his trumpet to his mouth. Cotilius showed, by one rapid gesture, that he understood the meaning of the nod, and seemed to plant himself with more

firmness upon his feet, his eye all the while being fixed steadfastly upon the centurion. The glare of the torches was so strong that I saw every thing as clearly as if the scene had passed at noonday. I saw Cotilius's keen blue eye as fierce as ever—I saw his lips pressed together steadily upon his teeth—I saw that the blood was still fervid in his cheeks, for the complexion of this man was of the same bold and florid brightness, so uncommon in Italy, which you have seen represented in the pictures of Sylla, and even the blaze of the torches seemed to strive in vain to heighten its natural scarlet. The trumpet was, as I have said, at the man's lips, and the soldier had lifted his sword from the ground, and my eye was fixed, as if by fascination, upon the bare throat of the prisoner, when suddenly a deep voice was heard amid the deadly silence, calling several times, "Cotilius ! Cotilius !—look up, Cotilius !"

The eye of Cotilius obeyed the summons more slowly than that of any other person who was present there—but at last it did obey it ; and he and I, and all the rest, beheld Aurelius Felix, the Christian priest, standing at an open window, not far distant from that at which I myself was placed ; and it was evident to all that it was from the old man's lips the voice had proceeded. Cotilius regarded him steadfastly for a moment, and then resumed his former posture ; but the old man called again more loudly than before—"Cotilius, Cotilius !" said he, and he stretched forth his fettered hand as he spake, and the sound of his voice was alike clear, earnest, and solemn—"Cotilius ! I charge thee, look upon the hand from which the blessed water of baptism was cast upon thy head. I charge thee, look upon me, and say truly, ere yet the blow be given, upon what hope thy thoughts are fixed ? Is this sword bared against the rebel of Cesar, or a martyr of Jesus ? I charge thee, speak ere thy blood flows ;—and for thy soul's sake, speak truly."

Cotilius kept his eye upon the old man while he was speaking, but I could not observe the least change in the expression of his countenance. When he was done, and even the soldiers that stood about appeared to be expecting his answer, a single bitter motion of derision passed

over his lips, and he nodded, as if impatiently, to the Prætorian whose lips were upon the end of the trumpet. The man blew, and while yet the surrounding arches were echoing the sound, the sword-bearer had executed his office, and the headless trunk fell heavily upon the pavement. Instinctively I turned me on the instant from the bloody spectacle, and my eye rested again upon the couch of Athanasia—but not upon the vision of her tranquillity. The clap with which the body of Cotilius fell upon the smooth stones of the court had, perhaps, reached the sleeping ear, and we all know with what swiftness thoughts chase thoughts in the wilderness of dreams. So it was that she started in her sleep, at the very moment when the mortal blow was given. The hand that had been slumbering amid her dishevelled ringlets was pressed fervently upon her brow, and she whispered—(for it was still but a deep whisper, although there was in its breath the intense earnestness of agony)—the dreaming maid whispered, in a tone that chilled my blood even more than that which I had witnessed—“Spare me—spare me, Trajan, Cesar, Prince—have pity—have pity on my youth—I conjure thee to be merciful!”—Then she paused for a moment, and the whisper began again—“Strengthen, strengthen me, good Lord!—Valerius, we must not lie, Valerius—fy! fy! we must not lie to save life—Thraso! Thraso! I see him, I see him. It is but a blow—a blow, Valerius—ha! a beast—a tiger—spare—spare, Trajan—sharp white teeth—how his eyes glare—Thraso—Felix—Valerius, Valerius, come close to me—Caius, come close to me—’Tis not the sun, Caius—no, no, ’tis not the sun—you know ’tis moonlight, and this is brighter than the sun. Valerius, kiss me, kiss me once more, Valerius—are my lips so cold, so very cold?—fy!—come, come, let us remember we are Romans—’tis the trumpet!”

The Prætorian trumpet sounded the march in the court below, and the armed hoofs clanged aloud—and Athanasia, starting from her troubled sleep, gazed wildly around the reddened chamber. The long blast of the trumpet was indeed in her ear—and Valerius hung over her—but after a moment the cloud of the broken dream passed away, and the maiden smiled as she extended her hand to

me from the couch, and began to gather up the long loose ringlets that floated all down upon her shoulders. She blushed and smiled mournfully, and asked me hastily whence I came, and for what purpose I had come; but before I could answer, the glare that was yet in the chamber around her seemed anew to be perplexing her, and she gazed from me to the red walls, and from them to me again, and then once more the trumpet was blown, and the melodious horn replied to it, and Athanasia sprang from her couch as if visited with a sudden consciousness that she was somehow concerned in the tumult. I know not in what terms I was essaying to tell her what was the truth, but I know that ere I had said many words, she discovered what was my meaning. For a moment she looked deadly pale, in spite of all the glare of the torch-light; but she recovered herself in a moment, and said, in a voice that sounded almost as if it came from a light heart, "But I must not go thus, Caius, you know I must not go to Cesar, without having at least a garland on my head. Where is my pretty little Marcia? Stay there, Valerius, and I shall be ready anon—quite ready."

So saying, Athanasia glided away from me, and passed into an adjoining chamber, where I heard her saluted by the jailer's daughter, whom she desired (and she said it gayly too) to trim the lamp, and go fetch the flowers that had been placed in water in the morning. The little maiden sung cheerily, and seemed to be doing as she was bid, for I could not but hear distinctly whatever passed between them.

It seemed to me as if Athanasia were less hasty than she had promised, yet many minutes elapsed not ere she returned to me, and she brought the lamp, too, in her hand. "For why," said she, "should I dress myself only for little Marcia and this Trajan? Do you not see that I have been at pains with myself? and who, think ye, would throw so much trouble away? for, after all, perhaps Trajan may disdain to take notice how a poor girl who has renounced Venus, and blasphemed against the three Graces, may chance to be arrayed when she comes before him." She spoke all this, however, in mere mockery; for the truth is, that she had made no alteration whatever

in her dress, excepting only that garland of flowers which I had heard her bid the damsel prepare for her. She plucked one of the blossoms from her hair as she drew near to me, and said, "Take it, Valerius; you must not refuse me this one token more; and you must know this also is a sacred gift, Valerius, for the Christians love this flower, and cherish it on account of the symbols with which its fair leaves are set forth. Look you, Caius, you must learn never to look upon it without kissing these red streaks—these blessed streaks of the Christian flower."

I took the flower from her hand, and pressed it to my lips; and I remembered that the very first day I saw Athanasia she had plucked such a one, when apart from all the rest, in one of the dark mossy alleys of the gardens of Capito. I told her what I remembered; it seemed as if the little circumstance I had mentioned had called up, in painful vividness, all the image of peaceful days that had passed away, and promised not to be restored again; for she, who had hitherto borne herself so bravely, replied not to me now without a faltering voice, and once more the visible shade of sorrowfulness gathered like a cloud upon her countenance. If the tear was ready, however, it was not permitted to drop; and Athanasia returned again to the Christian flower with all the usual composure both of her countenance and of her voice.

"Do you think there are any of them in Britain?" said she; "or do you think they would grow there? You must try, Caius; you must not leave Rome without getting some of the roots. And stay, I should like you to get them where you first saw the flower. You must promise me—indeed you must—that you will go to-morrow—yes, to-morrow, Caius, or next day, or some day, at least, before you think of your departure. You must go to my dear uncle, and he will not refuse you, when you tell him that it is for my sake he is to give you some of the roots of those pretty flowers of his; for he has hundreds of them all down that old dark alley, where I have wandered so often and plucked them, when no one suspected why I never put rose-buds, nor violets, nor hyacinths, nor any other flower, but only this into my hair. They call it the passion-flower, Caius; 'tis an emblem of an awful

thing. Look you here, Caius, these purple streaks are like trickling drops of blood ; and here, look ye, they are all round the flower. Is it not very like a bloody crown upon a pale brow ? I will take one of them in my hand, too, Caius ; and methinks I shall not disgrace myself when I look upon it, even though Trajan should be frowning upon me."

I had not the heart to interrupt her ; but heard silently all she said, and I thought she said the words quickly and eagerly, as if she feared to be interrupted.

The old priest came into the chamber while she was yet speaking so, and said, very composedly, " Come, my dear child, our friend has sent again for us, and the soldiers have been waiting already some space, who are to convey us to the Palatine. Come, children, we must part for a moment—perhaps it may be but for a moment—and Valerius may remain here till we return to him. Here, at least, dear Caius, you shall have the earliest tidings and the surest. Yes, yes, you will stay—all will go well, and we shall be with you again anon."

In saying these words, the good old man took Athanasia by the hand, and she, smiling now at length more serenely than ever, said only, " Farewell, then, Caius, farewell for a little moment !" And so, drawing her veil over her face, she passed away from before me, giving, I think, more support to the ancient Aurelius than, in her turn, she received from him. I began to follow them, but the priest waved his hand as if to forbid me—the door closed after them, and I was left alone. The thought rushed through my mind, " I have seen her—perhaps I have seen her for the last time ;" and I felt it pierced my bosom like a sword. I stretched myself upon the couch where Athanasia had reposed—the couch where Athanasia had dreamed of me—where her sleeping lips had murmured my name. I threw myself upon the place where she had lain ; and I would fain have wept, but my throat was dry, and no tears would come.

CHAPTER XIII.

I KNOW not, my friends, how to proceed with the narrative of what followed. Thoughts, passions, fears, hopes, succeeding so rapidly, or rather interfused so intensely, give to that strange night, when I look back upon it through the long vista of threescore years, the likeness of some wild, incoherent, fantastic, agonizing dream. Much, without doubt, of what passed in my own mind I have forgotten; but it seems to me as if what I saw were still present in all the distinctiveness of reality before my eyes, as if my ears were yet ringing with the echo of the least whisper that I heard. That chamber in the Mammer-tine—how impossible is it for me to forget the image of that deserted chamber! Its walls are at this moment before me blazing with the reflection of torch-light; and then again, as I saw them when a few minutes had elapsed, all dim and shadowy—the stars shining feebly upon them from the twilight sky—every thing around lonely and silent as a wilderness, except the voice of Silo's little maiden, which once and again sent to my half-unconscious ear a faint and remote echo of innocent infantine lamentation. Whither she had gone to bewail the departure of Athanasia, I knew not; I heard the child singing in a low and melancholy strain; and I arose from the couch, for the calmness of grief had suddenly succeeded to its tumult, and slow softening tears at last bathed my cheeks, as I gazed forth upon the solemn heavens and the wide darkening plain.

"You are calm, sir," said the jailer, who had come into the chamber, and stood behind me for a moment or two ere I observed him, "you are calm, sir; I am happy to see that you are calm: the prison is now perfectly quiet; will you walk with me towards the Palatine, that we may at least be near to know what is reported of their

proceedings? My brother will stay here, and take care of my girl till my return."

"Oh! yes, Silo," said I; "for, at least, I shall be better anywhere than here, and I would fain be in the open air."

We soon had descended from the Capitoline, passed through the silent Forum, and gained the brow of the opposite eminence, where, as shortly before around the precincts of the Mammertine, all was light and tumult. Every court was guarded with mounted and dismounted soldiery, and groups of busy men were passing continually and repassing about the different gates and porticoes of the imperial edifice. We interchanged no words, but I followed the guidance of Silo, who led me round and round the guarded buildings, apparently endeavouring to discover some traces by which he might conjecture in what part of them the examination of the prisoners was going on.

At last he fixed his eyes upon a certain point, where a more considerable detachment of the Prætorians were stationed, and in the neighbourhood of which there was altogether a greater appearance of light and bustle than elsewhere.

"Do you think they are there?" said I. "Are you acquainted with the palace, Silo?"

He shook his head in answer. "Am I acquainted with the palace? Ah! sir, little do you know through what strange vicissitudes of fortune I have passed. You do not know more familiarly the house in which you were born and reared, than I do every corner—every dark corner within these wide walls. But I have not crossed the threshold since the day Cesar died."

"Which Cesar, Silo? Do you mean Nerva, or Domitian, or—"

"Domitian," he replied, "was my master. I was the slave of Domitian, and he gave me my freedom."

"And you were within the palace on that day, Silo?"

"Yes, sir; I was indeed within the palace. I would have given no little price to be without it. It is not for me to speak against the prince who freed me. He was kind to his household."

"Then no man, Silo, is altogether wicked. There was some redeeming thing even about Domitian."

"Yes, sir ; and when he first came to be over all, all hoped fairly of him. But oh, sir ! it is a terrible thing to be tried with the temptation of power. I have often thought with myself, that it is like being given up by God into the hands of a cruel demon, who, unless you make a glorious conquest, must have his own way in all things, and will render your human voice nothing but a poor mouthpiece for uttering the imaginations of hell. But then, to be sure, there is the more honour for him who overcomes ; and I thought, till lately, that Trajan had been greatly strengthened. Now, however, you see that God permits even him, whom all call just, humane, and modest, to be blinded also for a time by this devil. I trust it shall not be ever so."

"Silo," said I, "you speak the truth, and you speak it strongly ; I fear, indeed, it is a struggle out of which few hearts could come unmarred. It must indeed be a terrible temptation."

"And then again, sir," quoth he, "I sometimes think it may be compared to the influence of strong wine, which they say does not so much alter men from themselves as make visible what they really are ; though they be at other times cunning enough to hide that from the eyes of the world. Perhaps it was so with my poor prince ; but it is not for me to speak—no, nor is it for any one to speak *now*—for he has gone to render his account where alone there is just judgment. And speak of these matters how we may, there is at least enough to make one think modestly ; for oh, sir ! the heart of man is a dark thing to look into ; and ONE, to whom I know you will yet cling steadfastly, has said, as perhaps you know already, 'Judge not, lest ye be judged.'"

While we were talking thus, Silo all the time kept his eyes fixed, not upon the part of the palace which seemed to be most probably the scene of the examination, but upon a certain long range of building, in which, unlike the rest of the imperial pile, there was no semblance either of light or tumult of any kind. "Do you see," said he, observing that my eye followed his,—“do you take notice of the

silence and darkness that prevail all along here? Well, it was not always thus, sir. I have seen the time when there was light enough here, and when the boldest eye in Rome did not look upon these arches without as much anxiety as either of us feels now."

"It was here," said I, "that Domitian lived. Is that your meaning?"

"Yes, sir, it was indeed here; and it was here, too, that he died;" and he pointed with his finger to a certain point in the midst of this deserted wing of the palace, where I saw pillars of more than usual magnificence supporting what seemed to be the roof of an open gallery. He paused for a moment, and then said, as if something had suddenly occurred to him, "Will you wait for me here, sir? I must run back to the prison. I must go; but I shall be back again on the instant."

"If it must be so," said I, "go, Silo, and I shall wait for you patiently. Alas! what avails it where we be? It is not with us, Silo, to contend against the demon of whom we were speaking."

"Nay, sir," he replied, "do not speak so dejectedly so long as hope is not extinguished. I shall be with you again anon."

The jailer left me, not without some little wonder that he should have done so at such a moment. But the things he had been saying had, I know not how, tended in some sort to tranquillize me; or perhaps it might be that, under the shade of those massive walls which had witnessed so many scenes of guilt and blood, and the luxury and the misery of tyrants, a kind of deadening feeling of the presence of Necessity, and the fruitlessness of Endeavour, and of the vanity of all human things, good and evil, had been breathed upon me, as it were, by the stern Genius of the place. I made no effort to seek for any intelligence—I never even thought of seeking out Sabinus, although I knew he must be somewhere at no great distance from where I was. I sat down, half in despair, half in resignation, at the foot of one of the brazen statues that were in the midst of the palace-court. I read the inscription upon its base, and found that I had taken my station beneath the image of that proud man who had already transmitted his name to

twelve succeeding masters of the world—that great Julius, who first drank the full cup of ambition, and found its dregs bitter. I sat there silent and solitary, beneath that memorial of departed grandeur, contemplating by turns, and in a mood that almost approached to indifference, the deserted scene of the pleasures, and the crimes, and the sufferings of Domitian, on the one hand—the gorgeous chambers of the magnificent Trajan on the other—the array of the imperial soldiers keeping watch at the busy palace-gate—and the shadow of Cesar's statue, which lay far out beyond me upon the pavement of the court.

In a word, I had scarcely once reflected upon Silo's leaving me ere he returned, having evidently in much haste performed his errand (whatever that might have been) to the Mammertine. "Valerius," said he, "you will at least pardon my absence when you know what was my intention. I suspected, when I saw where the chief guard was stationed, and I have since ascertained from one of the servants of Trajan, that the council is this night sitting in a chamber wherein I have witnessed many strange scenes, such as neither you, nor perhaps any man that is at this moment within the bounds of the Palatine, have the least conception of. Behold this key. I had preserved it by mere accident; but, if you have courage to follow my guidance, I think you will soon confess that the accident was not an unfortunate one."

I could not, for my life, imagine to what the words of Silo tended; but, as I have said already, I had fallen into a mood in which all things seemed almost alike, and I mechanically, rather than upon any course of reflection, signified my readiness to attend the jailer whithersoever it might please him to lead me. He looked cautiously around the court for a moment or two, and then, wrapping his gown closely about him, stepped very quietly towards the termination of the abandoned wing. I moved along with him. We entered beneath a small portico, beside the very threshold of which the grass was everywhere peeping through between the stones of the pavement; the key was applied to the gate, and the rusty lock, after one or two trials, yielded to its pressure; a large

empty hall received us, the circumference of which was scarcely visible by the dim light of the newly-risen moon, streaming down from a cupola, which hung far above, open to the sky. The door was hastily closed behind us, and we heard our whispers and our footsteps echoed with a strange distinctness, from the dark high arches around us, as we stepped into the centre of the long-deserted saloon. "Hush, hush!" said Silo, "I am sure there must be some one within hearing;" and at that moment a whole brood of swallows whirred close past us, and, circling and re-circling the lofty walls, the startled tenants of the place escaped from the presence of the intruders into the open air overhead.

Silo gazed for a moment after them, and threw open—for no key was necessary—the folding-doors of the first of a long range of chambers which opened upon the saloon. To this the beams of the moon had more access, and their light gleamed broadly here and there upon the heavy hangings of cloth of gold, and showed, at the same time, the long trailing spiders' webs, which had been woven upon their surface, all down from the cornices; but the windows through which the light found admittance had been long closed upon the air, and there was a feeling of weight and oppression about all the atmosphere of the room. The carpetings lay thick upon the floor, and we glided over them without disturbing the silence.

Another and another chamber we in like manner traversed in succession—all of them equally filled with the signs of magnificence. But at length we came to one much longer than any of these, and furnished in quite a different manner; for when first its door was opened, there was so much light reflected on every side, that I started, and could not help thinking we had intruded farther than Silo had intended. A second glance, however, seemed to indicate that we were still in the region of desolation, for a statue lay in the midst of the floor, one of its limbs snapped over, as if it had fallen and been permitted to remain. A table, however, stood not far from the statue, covered with vessels of silver and of porcelain, and it was not till I had come close up to it that I saw the dust lying thick upon these, and observed how much the

lustre of them had been tarnished. Silo, in the mean time, continued, as if riveted to the spot, in the middle of the room, close by the fallen statue, the shattered fragments of which he was, or seemed to be, contemplating.

"Where are we, Silo?" I whispered, "what place is this? what means the unnatural light that beams from the walls about us? and what, above all, betoken these strange relics, surrounded with so many symptoms of confusion?"

"Oh, sir!" he replied, "did you never hear men speak of the famous Phrygite walls? I thought all the world had heard of this place."

"I never heard of it," said I, "nor do I know the meaning of what you say."

"Then listen, listen, sir," he whispered, "and I will tell you what I thought all men had heard of. This is the place in which alone Domitian used to eat and sleep, and walk about for the last months of his life, when he was jealous of all men who came near him; and he contrived these walls, covered all over with the shining Ethiopian stone, that no one might be able to approach him without being discovered. The time that has passed since those days has somewhat dimmed their brightness; but then, sir, I promise you there was not a bit of all these walls of which the finest dame in Rome might not have been glad to make her mirror. I swear to you, sir, it was a strange sight to see how, even when a slave entered with a goblet of wine in his hand, the poor prince would start and stare around him, as if every side of the chamber had been invaded by some host of men; and yet, perhaps, it was all the while nothing more than fifty different reflections of one trembling eunuch. Alas! sir, as I said to you before, it is a fearful thing to be a tyrant. I am sure there was never a boy in all the house who would have changed pillows any night in all that year with Cesar; for it was visible to the least of us, that a whisper or a shadow was enough to discompose his countenance in the midst of all this grandeur."

"And where, Silo, did he fall?"

The jailer pointed with his finger to the broken statue,—"And look, look here, sir," he said, "look upon this shat-

tered piece of marble—it was behind this that they say he ran for safety, when he had felt the first treacherous blow; but I came not into the chamber till all had long been over, and I saw nothing but the blood upon the floor, and the statue lying here just as it does at present. Look, yonder in the corner is the couch he slept upon, and he had always a dagger under his head; and he called to the little page who was waiting upon him to fetch it from the place; but they had taken away the blade, and the scabbard only remained; and then in came Parthenius and Claudianus, and the gladiator, and all the rest, and he could make no resistance; and they soon finished what the cunning Stephanus had begun. But oh, sir! we have seen enough of this terrible chamber; let us go on, for we have not yet reached the place to which I wished to bring you; but it is not far off now.”

With this Silo walked to the end of the melancholy chamber, and pressing upon a secret spring, where no door was apparent, opened the way into a room darker and smaller than any of those through which we had come. He then said to me, “Now, sir, you must not venture upon one whisper more—you touch on the very heart of Domitian’s privacy. It is possible that the place I have been leading you to may have been shut up—it may exist no longer; but the state in which all things are found here makes me think it more likely that Trajan has never been master of its secret. And in that case, we shall be able both to see and to hear, without being either seen or heard, exactly as Domitian used to do, when there was any council held either in the Mars or the Apollo.”

I started at the boldness of the project, which now, for the first time, I understood; but we had come a long way, and I was in no mood for hesitation.

Silo laid his finger on his lips again and again as he looked to me,—very cautiously lifted up a piece of the dark-red cloth with which this chamber was hung,—and essayed another secret spring, which commanded a very small and narrow door in the panelling beneath. Total darkness appeared to be beyond; but the jailer, motioning to me to remain for a moment where I was, and to keep up the hanging, glided boldly into the recess. I won-

dered how he should tread so lightly, that I could not perceive the least echo of his footsteps; but this no longer surprised me, when I myself had been permitted to follow him, which, after being absent for several moments, he, appearing again at the entrance, and silently beckoning with his finger, invited me to do.

I found myself in a very narrow place, the floor of which felt beneath my foot as if it were stuffed like a pillow; and, after we had dropped the hanging of the adjoining chamber, every thing was totally dark, as it had at first appeared to me, except only at two points at some distance above my head, and considerably separated the one from the other, where, through divers small apertures, each about the size, it may be, of a human eye, there was a visible ray of light, manifestly artificial. Silo, taking hold of me by the hand, conducted me up some steps towards the nearest of these places; and, as I approached it, I heard distinctly the voices of persons talking together in the room from which the light must needs be proceeding. I did not draw my breath, you may well believe me, with much boldness at that moment; but my eye was soon fixed at one of the apertures, and, after the first dazzle was over, I saw clearly, for my position was close by one of its angles, the whole interior of the illuminated chamber beyond me. Silo took his station close by my side, and locking his arm in mine, gazed as earnestly as I did through another of these loop-holes, which, that you may understand every thing about it, were evidently quite concealed among the rich carved work of the ivory cornice.

The chamber was lighted up splendidly by three tall candelabra of silver, close beside one of which was placed a long table covered with an infinity of scrolls and tablets. One person, who had his back turned towards us, was writing at this table, and two others, in one of whom I instantly recognised the emperor himself, were walking up and down on the other side, and conversing together as they walked.

"No, Palma," said Trajan, for it was that old-favourite whom he addressed, "I have quite made up my mind as to this matter. I shall never, so long as I live, permit

any curious inquisition to be carried on concerning the private opinions of any man. Every man has a right, without question, to think—to believe—exactly what pleases him; and I shall concede as much in favour of every woman, Palma, if you will have it so. But it is totally a different affair, when the fact, no matter how, is forced upon my knowledge, that a subject, no matter who or what he be—a subject of the Roman empire, refuses to comply with the first, the elemental, and the most essential of all the laws by which the state is regulated. The man—ay, or the woman—who confesses in my presence contempt for the deities whom the commonwealth acknowledges in every step of its procedure—that person is a criminal; and I cannot dismiss him unpunished, without injuring the commonwealth by the display of weakness in its chief. As for these poor fanatics themselves, you do not suppose that I authorize their punishment without the same feelings of compassion which you yourself express? but it is the penalty of my station that I must control my feelings, and you well know it is not on such occasions as this alone that I essay to control them.”

“But you are satisfied, my lord,” said Palma, “that these people are really quite innocent as to Cotilius’s designs; and as it was upon that suspicion they were apprehended, perhaps it may be possible—”

“Possible! yes, Palma,” interrupted the prince, “quite possible and quite easy, too, provided they will condescend to save themselves by the most trivial acknowledgment of the sort, which, I repeat to you, I do and must consider as absolutely necessary. And women, too—and girls forsooth—I suppose you would have me wait till the very urchins on the street were gathering into knots to discuss the nature of the gods! Do you remember what Plato says?”

“No, my lord, I do not know to what you refer.”

“Why, Plato says, that nobody can ever understand any thing accurately about the Deity, and that, if he could, he would have no right to communicate his discoveries to others; the passage is in the *Timæus*, man, and Cicero has translated it besides. And is it to be

endured that these modern fanatics are to do every hour what the Platoes and the Ciceroes spoke of in such terms as these? Why, really, I think you carry your tolerance a little further than might have been expected from such a devout disciple of the Academy."

"I despise them, my lord, as much as yourself; but, to tell you the truth, it is this young lady that moves me to speak thus, and I crave your pardon if I have spoken with too much freedom. Her father was one of the best soldiers Titus had."

"The more is the pity, Palma. Have you ever seen the girl yourself? Did you give orders that she should be brought hither? I have not the least objection that you should have half an hour, ay, or an hour, if you will, to talk with her quietly; perhaps your eloquence may have all the effect we desire."

"I doubt it, my lord, I greatly doubt it," he replied; "but, indeed, I know not whether she be yet here.—Did you not send to the Mammertine?"

The man writing at the table, to whom this last interrogation was addressed, said, "I believe, sir, both this lady and the old man, who was in the same prison, are now in attendance." And upon this Trajan and Palma retired together towards the farther end of the apartment, where they conversed for some minutes in a tone so low that I could not understand any thing of what was said. Trajan at length turned from his favourite with an air, as I thought, of some little displeasure, and said aloud, coming back into the middle of the room, "I know perfectly well it is so, Palma; but what is that to the affair in hand? I am very sorry for the Sempronii, but I doubt if even they would be so unreasonable as you are."

"Will you not see the poor girl yourself, Cesar?" said the favourite.

"Cornelius Palma," replied the prince, "you do not need to be told, that my seeing her would only make it more difficult for me to do that which, seeing or not seeing her, I know to be my duty. Do you accept of my proposal? Are you willing to try the effect of your own persuasion? I promise you, if you succeed, I shall rejoice even more heartily than yourself; but it is rather

too much to imagine that I am personally to interfere about such an affair as this—an affair which, the more I think of it, seems to me to be the more perfectly contemptible. Nay, do not suppose it is this poor girl I am talking of—I mean the whole of this Jewish, this Christian affair, which does indeed appear to me to be the most barefaced absurdity that ever was permitted to disturb the tranquillity of a great empire. Think of it, I pray you, but for a single moment. A mean and savage nation of barbarians have but just suffered the penalty of obstinacy and treachery alike unequalled, and from them—from the scattered embers of this extinguished fire, we are to allow a new flame to be kindled, ay, and that in the very centre of Rome—here—where I speak to you—within sight of my palace! I tell you, that if my own hand were to be scorched in the cause, I would disperse this combustion to the winds of heaven; I tell you, that I stand here Cesar in the midst of Rome, and that I would rather be chained to the oar, Palma, or whipped for a slave, than suffer, while the power to prevent it is mine, the least, the tiniest speck to be thrown upon the face of the Roman majesty. By all the gods, Palma, it is enough to make a man sick to think of the madness that is in this world, and of the iron arguments by which we are compelled to keep those from harming us who at first sight of them excite no feeling but our pity. I am weary of these very names of Palestine—Jew—Christian; and, by Jupiter, I must have my ears rid of them. Go to this foolish girl, and try what you can make of her; but I give you fair warning, that I will have Rome troubled with no breeders of young Christians.”

Trajan whispered something further into the ear of Palma, and then lifting up one of the books that lay upon the table, retired with it from the chamber, passing, as it seemed, yet farther into the interior of the palace.

Cornelius Palma, after the prince was gone, sat down over-against the person who was by the writing-table, and leaning with his hand upon his brow, was apparently for some space busied with his reflections upon what he had heard. He then talked in a low and whispering

manner with the secretary (for such I supposed him to be) of Trajan ; but I could catch only a few words, sufficient to indicate that the same affair was still the subject of discussion. The end of it was, that the secretary pointed to a door opposite to that by which his master had departed, and that Palma walked towards it as if about to enter the adjoining chamber. But the moment Silo perceived this, he pulled me by the hand, and, in a word, he soon conducted me to the other end of this closet, where, as I have told you already, the light appeared to find admittance in a similar manner. From that corner another of the imperial apartments was visible in equal distinctness, and the first glance showed me Athanasia and her ancient friend, sitting there quietly together, as if waiting now at length, in entire composure, the moment when they should be summoned into the presence of their judge. The door of the room was opened almost at the same time by the soldier who guarded it, and Palma entered, with an air which might not, perhaps, appear the less alarming because of its extreme gravity and calmness. The old man and Athanasia both arose to salute him, and he, courteously returning their salutation, beckoned to them both that they should sit down again. He himself leaned his elbow upon the pedestal of one of the busts that were ranged about the apartment, and, after pausing so for some moments, desired the attendant soldier to withdraw for a little, as he had something to say in private to the prisoners.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE soldier had withdrawn himself for some moments ere Palma spoke ; and it was evident, from the manner in which he, during this interval, regarded Athanasia, how much he was affected by seeing one so fair, and so young, and so noble, bound with the fetters and expect-

ing the fate of guilt. As for Aurelius, the senator scarcely once looked upon him, and I thought when he did so that there was not only indifference, but something very like distrust and displeasure in his glance. It was to the old man, nevertheless, that his first words were addressed. "From what has just been reported to me," he said, "of your behaviour at the execution of the traitor Cotilius, I fear there is nothing to be gained by speaking to *you* concerning the only means by which your own safety can yet be secured. You are obstinate, old man, in your superstitions. I see by your looks that there is no chance of persuading you."

"Noble Palma," replied the priest, "contempt is the only thing I fear from men. But I thank my God that it is the only thing I have it in my power to avoid."

"I will not argue with you," answered Palma. "It was not with any purpose of bending you that I undertook this painful office. I pray you to leave us for a moment, that I may speak in freedom with one whose case is, I trust, less hopeless."

The old priest rose up, and pointed to the fetters that were upon his arms, and said meekly, "I resist in nothing—let them guard me whither it pleases you."

"Sir," said Athanasia, "I pray you let Aurelius remain; you are much in the wrong, if you imagine that I shall either hear or answer less freely because of my friend being present."

"He will, at least, retire to the other end of the chamber," said Palma; "and remember, that it is not his part to interfere any further."

The priest retired as he was bidden, and sat down at a considerable distance, with his arms folded upon his breast, and his eyes fixed upon Athanasia. She, on her part, seeing that Palma hesitated, and seemed at a loss how to begin, said to him, in a tone of modest composure, "Noble sir, believe that I am most sensible to the kindness of your meaning; but if your purpose be indeed as kind as I think it is, I pray you spare me at least the pain that is needless—and spare yourself what I am sure is painful to you. You see my youth and my sex, and it is not unnatural for you to think as you

do ; but know that my faith is fixed, and that I hope I shall not be deserted, when I strive even at the last moment to do it no dishonour."

"This old man," said Palma, "has made you, then, thoroughly a Christian?"

"I would it were so," she answered—"I would to God it were so!"

"The prince," resumed Palma, "has knowledge both of your father's character, and of the race from which you are sprung, and of the goodness of your own heart, young lady ; and I tell you, that if you persist in this manner, you will give pain, much pain, to more than you have yet thought of—to me, lady—nay, to Trajan himself ;—and as for your family, have you yet seriously considered into what misery they must be plunged?"

"Oh, sir," she replied, "you mean kindly ; but this is cruel, cruel kindness. I have considered all things. God knows I have considered well. I have wept, I have prayed ; but, I thank God, I have as yet been sustained, and I trust I shall be so yet further."

"Lady," answered Palma, "the touch of the physician's knife is painful, yet his hand must not falter ; nor must I shrink from speaking to you. But I have sent for those who, I hope, may speak yet more effectually." So saying, the senator turned from the place where he had been leaning himself, manifestly much shaken by the behaviour of the maiden. He walked to the other end of the chamber, over-against where Aurelius was sitting, and, opening the door, said something which I heard not to the soldier who watched there. He then went and sat down also in a corner of the room ; while Athanasia, having risen up, stood trembling, being much agitated, as was evident, with the expectation of an interview, whose nature, without question, she already in some measure suspected.

Her eye was fixed upon the open door of the chamber ; and after a moment had elapsed, there entered, even as I had anticipated, both her uncles, Lucius and Velius. Behind them came, wrapped all over in her consecrated veil, the stately priestess of Apollo ; and last of all,

gazing wildly and distractedly around, her eyes red with weeping, and all her apparel disordered, the friend of her youth, and the sister of her bosom,—she to whom, in all things save one, her heart had ever been laid open—the beautiful and the miserable Sempronia. The two Sempronii advanced with calm steps, deeply dejected, towards the place where Athanasia stood waiting their approach, as if rooted to the ground. The priestess walked yet more slowly, and lifted, as she walked, the veil from off her face, which was pale, but quite unmoved, so that I knew not well how to interpret its meaning. But as for poor young Sempronia, when she at last rested her eye upon her friend, and saw the fettered hands, that were clasped together, as if in agony, upon her bosom, she, poor thing, screamed aloud, dashed the blinding tears from her eyelids, rushed past them all, and was folded at once in the cold embrace of Athanasia—I say, her cold embrace, for, although I saw that she pressed her cousin to her bosom, I saw also that she trembled from head to foot, and that her pale face and dilated eyes were still turned, as if she had no power to take them away, upon those who approached towards her, with steps so much more slow, and with seriousness so much more terrible, at such a moment, even than all the passion of young Sempronia's sympathy.

“My dear Athanasia,” said Lucius, taking her by the hand, “you must not look upon us thus—you cannot think that we are come with any thought of giving you unnecessary pain. We come to you as to a daughter—we think you have done wrong, but we have not forgotten the days that are past.”

“My poor girl,” said old Velius, “listen to Lucius, listen to your best friends. Do you put more faith in the words of strangers than in the blood of kindred—the affection of your father's brothers—the guardians of his dear orphan?”

“Who is me!” said Athanasia—“O God, strengthen me! Why, oh! why am I forced to wound these kind hearts! Have pity upon me, have pity upon me—you know not what you speak of, else you would all be silent.”

"Weep," said the priestess; "yes, weep, and weep largely. There is yet time for you to repent: abjure this madness; come, come, and let the last of your tears be shed upon the altars of your paternal gods, and they also will be merciful. Nay, tremble not when you hear my voice, Athanasia. I love you as tenderly as the rest; and if you have deceived me also, I pardon you—I have long since pardoned you."

And the priestess stooped where she stood, and imprinted a silent kiss upon the forehead of the victim; but she could not stop her tears, which flowed, indeed, like waters from a fountain, all down her marble cheeks, and upon the naked shoulders of young Sempronia, who also still clung around her vehemently—seeing and hearing nothing—inconsolable in anguish.

Athanasia bowed her head, and wept at length audibly, for hitherto her grief had been silent. For a moment or two she wept so, and no one said any thing to interrupt the wholesome relief of nature. But the maiden soon recovered herself, and gently removing the arms of Sempronia, stood erect once more, and calm in the midst of her relations.

"My friends," said she, "you have seen that I do not bear this lightly. But it cannot last for ever. The moments you have to be with me are, without doubt, numbered, and what avails it that they should be spent in speaking and in hearing words that can have no effect? I am a Christian—I have been baptized in the name of Christ—I have partaken of the symbols of the Christian mystery—and I have no more power to bring myself out of this peril than he who stands in the front rank—without sword or buckler—deprived of all things but his honour."

"Athanasia," said Velius, "alas! my dear girl, what madness is this that has taken possession of your bosom? Do you hold yourself wiser than all the wise men, and all the good, and all the great men that have ever lived in Rome? Do you deem yourself able to penetrate mysteries from which all the sages of the earth have retreated with reverent humility? Consider with yourself once more, I pray you, and remember the

modesty that might be becoming in your tender years—and, I must speak the truth, your ignorance.”

“Oh, sir !” she answered, “little, little do you know my heart, if you think that I have been brought into this place because of my being puffed up with any emptiness of conceit. I know well that I am a poor, young, unlearned creature : but God gives not according to our deserts ; and because I am poor and ignorant, must I therefore reject the promise of his riches, and the great light that has been manifested to me, which, would to God it had also been to you, despite the perils which a dark world has thrown around it.”

“O, Athanasia !” said young Sempronia, now for the first time opening her lips, “I know the secrets of your heart, although you have kept from me some of them. Oh think, my dear sister, of all the love that we bear to you—and, oh ! think of Valerius—for I know he is dear to your thoughts—I know you love him.”

“The more is the sacrifice,” said Athanasia. “I do love Valerius ; but he also is a Christian—at least I hope in God he will soon be so.”

“Amen ! amen !” said the old man, who had hitherto been silent.

The priestess turned round when she heard him speaking, and observing that he also was fettered, and the great steadfastness which was upon his countenance, her sorrow seemed instantly to give place to anger, and she began to reproach the old man bitterly, even as if he alone were to blame for all the danger of Athanasia, and for all the affliction of her kindred.

“Behold,” said she, “old man—behold the end of your work. Look here, and see to what you have conducted the disciple of your phrensy. Your hairs are gray, your eyes are dim, and your feeble clay is already yearning, it may be, to be sprinkled into ashes. But look here, cruel, bloody, ruthless apostate ! look here, and behold what a victim you have bound along with you to the altar of your madness. Oh ! may the gods that see all things look into your wicked heart, and have pity and mercy upon the errors of youth—of deceived, ensnared, abused, slaughtered, murdered youth.

Oh ! yes, old and feeble though you be, may strength be given to you in anger, that you may taste the full struggle and the true agony. May you be strong to wrestle, that you may fall slowly, and feel your fall ! Would to the gods, just and merciful, that you might struggle and fall alone !”

The old man arose from his seat when he heard himself thus addressed, and answered calmly, although the fire was kindled in his eye, and his cheek was no longer coloured with the paleness of extenuated age. “Amen ! lady,” he said ; “most surely your last wish is mine. But why is it that you have come hither with cruel words, to imbitter equally the last moments of a life that is dear to you, and a life that you despise ? Go, leave us where we are ; we ask not for your pity, and you have no right to come hither to wound us with your contempt. You speak of ignorance and of deceit. O, little do you know who it is that is ignorant, and who it is that is deceived. We are the servants of the living God, whose light, in spite of all the powers of earth and of hell, will soon shine abroad among the nations, and quench in utter oblivion the feeble, false, glimmering tapers, fashioned with the hands of men, with which hitherto ye have sat contented amid the darkness, and blessed yourselves as the favoured of the earth. Yes, man may bind with chains, and slay with the sword—but think ye that the spirit is his to do with it what he will ? or think ye, in your vanity, that the chain, and the dungeon, and the sword of man can alter the course of things that are to be, or shake from its purpose the will of Him in whom, blind and ignorant, ye refuse to behold the image of the Maker of all things—shutting eyes, and ears, and your proud hearts, and blaspheming against the God of heaven, whose glory ye ascribe to stocks and stones, and to the ghosts of wicked and bloody tyrants, long since mouldered into dust ; and to the sun, and the moon, and the beautiful stars of the sky, which God set there to rule the day and the night, even as he lets loose the wind, to scatter the leaves of the forest, and to lift up the waves of the great deep, and send them roaring upon the land ?

Leave us, I charge you. The young and the old are alike steadfast, for God is our strength, and he bestows it on them that ask for it in the name of the Redeemer."

"Peace, blasphemer!" said the priestess; "I serve the altar, and came not hither to hear the gods of heaven and earth insulted by the lips of old and hardened impiety. Once more, Athanasia, will you speak the word and go with us, or will you stay here and partake the fate of this madman?"

"Oh, God!" said the maiden, "how shall I speak that they may at length hear me! My dear friends—my dear, dear friends—if you have any love, any compassion, I pray you kiss me once, and bid me farewell kindly, and lay my ashes—when I am no more—in the sepulchre of my father—beside the urn of my dear mother. I tell you truly, you need not fear that I will disturb the repose of the place—I tell you most truly that I die not in anger against any one, and that I shall have rest at length when I am relieved from this struggle. Oh! pardon me, if in any thing besides this I ever gave you pain—remember none of my offences but this—think of me kindly. And go now, my dear friends, kiss me once each of you; kiss my lips in love, and leave me to bear that which must be borne, since there is no escape from it but in lying, and in baseness, and in utter perdition here and hereafter. May the Lord strengthen his day soon, and may ye all bless the full daylight, although now ye are startled by the troubled redness of the dawn! Farewell—kiss me, Velius—kiss me, Lucius—my aunt also will kiss me, for she loves me too, in spite of all things."

They did kiss her, and tears were mingled with their embraces, and they said no more, but parted from her where she was; and Palma, the senator, lifted the desolate Sempronia from the ground, on which she had fallen, and he and her father carried her away, apparently quite senseless, with all her black tresses sweeping the pavement as they moved. And so Athanasia and Aurelius were once more left alone in the chamber.

They were alone—and they were close together, for the old man hastened to Athanasia the moment the

others had left her. "The moment is come," said Silo; "now, now, at last, sir, prepare yourself to risk every thing where every thing may be gained."

He did not whisper this, but spake the words boldly and aloud; and ere I could either answer any thing, or form any guess as to his meaning, he had leaped down from my side, and thrown open, by touching another secret spring, a door which formed a communication (of course entirely unsuspected) between our lurking-place and the chamber in which our friends were standing. Silo rushed in, and I followed him. It was all done so rapidly that I scarce remember how it was done. I cannot, indeed, forget the wild and vacant stare of Athanasia, the cry which escaped from her lips, nor the fervour with which she sunk into my embrace. But all the rest is like a dream to me. The door closed swiftly behind us; swiftly—swiftly I ran, bearing the maiden in my arms, through all the long course of those deserted chambers. Door after door flew open before us. All alike breathless and speechless, we ran on. We reached the last of the chambers, the wide and echoing saloon, ere my heart had recovered from the first palpitation of surprise; and a moment after we breathed once more the free air of heaven, beneath the pillars of the portico.

"Stop not," said I; "for the sake of God, stop not. Hasten, Silo; it is you that must guide us."

"Ha!" said he, "already have they perceived it! Great God! after all, is it in vain!" He paused as he said so, and we heard distinctly voice echoing voice, and the clapping of doors. "Treachery, treachery! Escape, escape!" they shouted at the gates; and horn and trumpet mingled in the clamour of surprise, wrath, terror.

"Ride, ride," screamed a voice high over all the tumult—"ride, ride this instant, and guard every avenue."

"Search every corner—search the wing of Domitian," cried another.

The horsemen galloped furiously hither and thither across the courts; trumpet, and horn, and cymbal re-

sounded above the shouting of men, and the neighing of the startled chargers.

"We are lost—we are lost!" said Silo, clasping his hands upon his brow. "We shall never reach the gate, and they must discover every thing on the instant."

"Let us run to the temple of Apollo," said I—strange to tell, I felt comparatively cool at that moment; "the priestess will at least give shelter to Athanasia—we at least must try her."

"Thank God," whispered Silo, "there is one chance more." And so we began again to run as swiftly as before, and keeping close beneath the shaded wall of the edifice, and then threading, under the guidance of the jailer, many narrow passages of the hanging-gardens of Adonis, we reached, indeed, the adjoining court of the Palatine, and stood, where all was as yet silent and undisturbed, within the broad shadow of the sacred portico. The great gate we tried to open, but it was barred. Athanasia, however, who by this time had recovered herself astonishingly, pointed out a postern at the corner of the portico, and by that we, without further difficulty, gained the interior of the temple.

It was all filled as before (for here the alternations of the day and night made no difference), with the soft and beautiful radiance proceeding from the tree of lamps. But the fire on the altar of the god burned high and clear, as if very recently trimmed, and behind its blaze stood one of the ministering damsels, whom I had formerly seen embroidering in company with Athanasia. Her hand held the chain of the censer, and she was swinging it slowly from side to side, while the clouds of fragrant smoke rolled high up above the piercing flames;—and the near light, and the intervening smoke, and the occupation with which she was busied, prevented her from at first perceiving what intrusion had been made on the solitude of the sacred place. Athanasia ran up to her, and clasping the knees of the astonished girl with her fettered hands, began to implore her by the memory of old affection and companionship, and for the sake of all that was dear to her, to give escape, if escape were possible,—at least to give concealment. The girl dropped the cen-

ser from her hand—she gazed wildly, and stammered incoherently, and seemed to be utterly confused, and unable to guess what was the meaning of what she saw and heard.

“Lady!” said Silo, rushing forward, and falling down before her by the side of Athanasia; “oh, lady! stand not here considering, for this is the very moment of utmost peril for her—for us—for all of us. For the sake of all that is dear and holy, if you have access to any secret place, lay it open speedily, and the prayers of all that you behold shall for ever be calling down blessings on your head. Behold these fetters—they tell you from what her flight hath been.”

The girl grasped the hands of Athanasia, and gazed upon the manacles, but still seemed quite amazed and stupified; and while she was yet standing so, and Silo was renewing his entreaties, we heard suddenly some one trying to open the door by which we had entered, and which the jailer had fastened behind us, as soon as we had all crossed the threshold. Once and again a violent hand essayed to undo the bolt, and then all was quiet again. And in a moment after, the great gate of the temple was itself thrown open, and the priestess of Apollo entered the fane, followed by her two brothers, who supported between them the yet faint and weeping young Sempronia. In a moment Athanasia had rushed across the temple, and, strong in the mingled energy of hope and fear, knelt down with her forehead to the ground, her hands clasped together, and her long hair kissing the marble close by where the feet of her haughty kinswoman were planted.

Surprise held every one dumb for an instant; but it was the priestess who first broke the silence.

“Athanasia!” said she; “rash, unhappy girl, speak, by what magic do I behold you here? How have you escaped? and why, having done so, do you choose this place for your retreat? Think ye, that here, in the temple of Apollo, the priestess of an insulted god can give shelter to blasphemy flying from the arms of justice? Ha! and he, too, is here! Old man, what brought thee hither? I think our acquaintance scarce warranted this intrusion. Speak—speak, unhappy girl, and let me un-

derstand what all this means ; for at present every thing is dark, and I see only that you have brought hither—”

“ Friends, friends—oh ! blame them not,” interrupted the maiden, “ oh ! blame them not for doing much—for venturing all to save me. Oh ! help us, and help speedily ; for they search everywhere, and they will come hither, too, anon.”

“ Come hither !” cried the priestess ; “ who, I pray you, will come hither ? Ha ! run, fly, bolt the door. If Cesar speaks, I will answer ; but at no lower bidding shall I unfold the temple-gate. Ha ! methinks you imagine every one may be as venturous and as successful as yourself.”

The gate, meantime, had been made fast, and it was well that it had been so ; for scarcely had the priestess made an end of speaking, ere the sound of horses’ feet, and the ringing of arms, and the voices of angry men, were heard distinctly approaching towards us. In a moment more we could hear them talking together beneath the very portico, and trying, in their turn, to thrust open the massive valves of the temple.

“ Who calls there ?” cried the priestess, in a stern tone—“ Who calls and knocks there ? If a suppliant approaches, I think he might approach more modestly.”

“ Castor !—We are no suppliants,” answered a rough voice from without ; “ but you had better open your door, old dame, and let us see whether the rats have not got to their holes here. It is no use speaking ; if you have had them baked into a pie, we must see them. Dead or alive, you must give up our pretty Christians. Come, come, my sly masters ; yield, yield, there is no flying from Cesar.”

“ Peace, insolents !” quoth the priestess ; “ peace, and begone on the instant ! This is the temple of Apollo, and ye shall find no Christians here, I warrant you.”

The man still thundered at the door, however, and she resumed more sternly than ever,—“ Wretch, profane outcast, I charge thee once more, be still ! Has impiety crept even to the camp ? Turn, rude man, and dread the arm that guarded Delphos !”—and saying so, she at length lifted up the fearful Athanasia, and walked, all present

following at some little distance, towards the other extremity of the fane, where, as I had occasion once to tell you before, the private chamber of the priestess was situated on the right-hand beyond the statue of Apollo. In passing, she stopped for an instant, and, kissing the feet of the statue, seemed to murmur some secret invocation for help—perhaps it might be for pardon. She kept hold of Athanasia's hand all the while, but said not one word either to her or to any of us ; while the two uncles and the young Sempronia appeared to be still kept silent by the surprise with which all these unforeseen things had affected them.

She led us across the chamber in which, on a former day, I had heard Athanasia sing ; and in like manner, having taken a lamp in her hand, on through the long passages which conduct towards the receptacle wherein the Sibylline prophecies are said to be preserved. She opened the door, which she had, on that former day, told me led into the repository of those mysterious scrolls. Two inner doors appeared before us ; that to the left she opened likewise, and we perceived, descending from its threshold, a long dark flight of steps, as if going down into the centre of the rock. " Here," said she, as she paused, and held the lamp over the gloomy perspective, " here, at last, I leave you, having already done too much, whether I think of the god I serve, or of Trajan, or of myself. But for the blood of kindred not little may be dared. Go with her, since you have come with her—more I cannot do—here, take this lamp—the door at the bottom is fastened only from within ; let it fall behind you, and make what speed you may."

" One thing," said Silo, " had better be done ere you depart ;" and so, very adroitly, he, by means of his jailer's key, relieved both of them from their fetters. He then turned to me, and said, " Go no farther, Valerius ; you may rest assured that no one suspects us."

I saw that he designed to return into the courts of the Palatine, and so proceed homeward, as if ignorant of every thing that had occurred : I saw this ; and it was evident that Silo had no other course to pursue, either in duty to himself or to his family. But for me, all my cares

were here. I squeezed by the hand both Lucius and Velius, and both warmly returned my pressure. The priestess gave the lamp into my hand, and the door was shut upon us ; and we began, with hearts full of thankfulness—but not yet composed enough to taste of lightness—with thankfulness uppermost, I think, in our confused thoughts, and with no steady footsteps, to descend into the unknown abyss, that yawned black and deep before us.

CHAPTER XV.

THE steps were abrupt and narrow, but in a few minutes our feet became accustomed to them, and we descended rapidly. After we had done so for some time, we found ourselves in a low chamber of oblong form, in the midst of which an iron stake was fixed into the floor, having chains of ponderous workmanship attached to its centre, and over-against it, on the one side, a narrow chair of the same metal, and it also immovable. I asked Athanasia to repose herself here for a moment ; for it was evident that the tumultuous evening had much worn out her strength. But she said, shuddering, “ No, no, not here, Valerius ; I never saw this place before, but the aspect of it recalls to me many fearful stories, and explains the meaning of many dark hints, that at the time when I heard them I could not understand. Here, without question, many a poor wretch has expiated his offences against the dignity of the shrine and the servants of Apollo. I have heard the priestess allude to this dreary place—I cannot bear to stay in it. Aurelius knows, I doubt not, some humble Christian roof beneath which we may be safe until the first search be over. Let us breathe at least the open air, and God, who has hitherto helped, will not desert us.”

“ There you speak rightly,” said Aurelius ; “ let us not linger here amid the scenes of darkness and blood. Christian roofs, indeed, are known to me both humble and

lofty, which would gladly shelter us ; but how are we to know how far suspicion may already have extended, or why should we run any needless risk of bringing others into peril, having, by God's grace, escaped ourselves from the most imminent peril, at the very moment when all hope, as to this life, had been utterly taken from us ? Let us quit these mysterious precincts—let us quit them speedily—but let us not rashly be seen in the busy city. There is a place known to me (and Athanasia also has, with far different purposes, visited it heretofore), where safety, I think, may be expected, and where, if danger do come, it can find no unnecessary victim. Let us hasten this night to the catacombs,* which are beyond the Esquiline. There, but a few nights ago, we committed to the dust the mortal relics of Thraso. I thought this evening to have approached the companionship of his better part. Beside the tomb of the blessed martyr we will offer up thanks for our deliverance, and await in patience the hour that is to make us altogether free—or to undo what has been done.”

“ Yes, dear father, let us go together,” said the maiden ; “ there is no one will seek us ; there, best of all, shall our thanksgivings and our prayers be offered. We will sit by the sepulchre of the holy man ; and Valerius will go into the city, and procure what things are needful.”

She leaned upon me as she said so, and we began the descent of another flight of steps, beyond the dark chamber ; this terminated at length in a door, the bolts of which being withdrawn, we found ourselves beneath the open sky of night, at the extremity of one of the wooded walks that skirt the southern base of the Palatine—the remains of the more than Assyrian splendour of groves and gardens, which had once connected the golden house of Nero with the more modest structures of his predecessors. I wrapped Athanasia in my cloak, and walked beside her in my tunic ; and the old priest conducted us by many windings—avoiding, as far as was possible, all the glare of the Suburra—round about the edge of the city, towards the place of which he had spoken.

To my astonishment, it was not in any wild and desert place, but in the midst of the gardens which hang over the city wall, by the great Esquiline gate, that Aurelius at last desired us to slacken our pace, for that we had reached very nearly the end of our journey.

"Is it here," said I, "is it here, in the centre of all this splendour, that you hope to find a place of more safety than any private dwelling could afford you? The dead, indeed, are safe everywhere; but surely you have not chosen wisely such a retreat as this for the living!"

"Have patience," replied the old man; "you are but a stranger in Rome—and yet, after all, you speak what I should have heard without surprise from many who have spent all their days in it. For few ever think of entering a region which is almost as extensive as Rome itself, and none, I think, are acquainted with all the labyrinthine windings of that strange region."

So saying, the priest led the way into the centre of one of the thickest of the groves. The trees were tall and strong, and their branches formed a canopy overhead through which scarcely here and there the twinkling beams of a single star could penetrate. The undergrowth, however, was, if possible, still more luxuriant; insomuch, that not without great difficulty could we force for ourselves any passage among the close creeping shrubs and wide-spread bushes of alder. Perseverance, nevertheless, at length accomplished what seemed to me at first almost impracticable. We reached the centre of the wide thicket, and there, within the circuit of the woody screen, we found a small space of soil, comparatively bare. The light of moon and star plunged down there among the surrounding blackness of boughs and thick leaves as into some deep well, and showed the entrance of a natural grotto, which had, indeed, all the appearance of neglect, oblivion, and utter desertedness.

"Confess, Valerius," said the old man, "that I did not deceive you, when I promised a safe and a lonely shelter. But there is no hurry now; sit you down here by the mouth of the cavern, and let me taste once more the water of this hidden fountain, for my lips are parched and dry, and no one will disturb us."

I had not observed, until the old man said this, a small fountain hard-by the mouth of the grotto, which, in former days, had evidently been much cared for, although now almost all its surface was covered with water-lilies, and other tender flowers, that spread their leaves abroad over it. The marble, also, with which the sides of the fountain were coated, now showed dim and green, by reason of the undisturbed moisture, and the creeping moss; nor had a statue, that reposed just within the entrance of the grot, escaped the general desolation, for the damp grass had grown up so as half to cover the recumbent limbs, and the beautiful Parian stone had lost all its brightness.

"You can scarcely see where the inscription was," said Aurelius, "for the letters are filled up or effaced; but I remember when many admired it, and I think I can still repeat the lines—yes, it was thus they ran:—

‘Nymph of the grot, these sacred springs I keep,
And to the murmur of these waters sleep;
Ah! spare my slumbers, gently tread the cave,
And drink in silence, or in silence lave.’*

Little did they who graved this command conjecture how well it was to be obeyed. But there should be another inscription here, and one of a very different tenour. Ay, here it is," said he, stepping on a long flat piece of marble, almost buried among the weeds, "here is it also; but it would be a more difficult matter for me to remember all the words that I have seen legible upon this fatal monument."

I was advancing to examine the stone, but the old man stopped me, and said, "No, no; what avails it to spell out the record of an old forgotten murder? Do you remember the story of Asinius? it is told somewhere by Cicero. It was within this very cavern that the man

* So Pope has rendered the beautiful lines of the celebrated inscription:—

Hujus Nympha Loci, sacri custodia fontis,
Dormio, dum blandæ sentio murmur aquæ;
Parce meum, quisquis tangis cava marmora, sonantem.
Rumpere; sive bibas, sive lavere, tace.

was butchered ; and now, you see, both he and his monument are alike sinking into forgetfulness. I believe, however, the monument itself must bear the blame of part of this ; for I have heard my father say, that he had often been told this was one of the most favourite fountains about all this quarter until that slaughter took place, and then people became more shy of coming hither. It is all owing to that stone, that the precept of the Sleeping Nymph has been so well complied with.* But for that the underwood round about us would never have been permitted to thrive so wildly."

Athanasia, in the mean time, had sat down by the margin of the grotto, and was laving her forehead with the water of the solitary fountain. Old Aurelius, too, dipped his hands in the well and tasted of the water, and then turning to me he said, with a grave smile, "Valerius, methinks you are religious in your regard for the slumbers of the nymph." He whispered something into the ear of Athanasia, and received an answer from her in the same tone, ere he proceeded. "Draw near—fear not that I shall do any thing rashly—we owe all things to your love—we know we do ; but speak plainly,—Do you indeed desire to be admitted into the fellowship of the true Faith ? Let not the symbol of regeneration be applied hastily. Without doubt, great were my joy might my hands be honoured so as to shed the blessed water of baptism upon the brow of my dear Valerius."

"Ah, Valerius !" said Athanasia, "I know God has touched your heart ; why should this be delayed any longer ? You have shared the perils of the faithful. Partake with them in good, as well as in evil. Hesitate no longer ; God will perfect what has been so nobly begun."

"My father," said I, "and my dear Athanasia, dearer to me than all things, I hesitate only because I doubt if I am yet worthy. Surely I believe that this is the right faith, and that there is no God but the Jehovah whom you worship."

"Beautiful is humility in the sight of Heaven," said the

* *Asinius autem brevi illo tempore quasi in hortulos iret, in arenarias quasdam juxta portam Exquiliniam perductus, occiditur.—Pro Cluent.*

old man ; and with that he rose up from the place where he had been sitting, and began, standing by the margin of the well, to pour out words of thanksgiving and supplication, such as I have never heard equalled from any human lips but his. The deep calm voice of the holy man sounded both sweet and awful in the breathless air of midnight. The tall black trees stood all around, like a wall, cutting us off from the world, and from the thoughts of the world ; and the moon, steady overhead in the serene blue sky, seemed to shower down light and beauty upon nothing in all the wide world but that little guarded space of our seclusion. I stepped into the cool water of the fountain. The old man stooped over me, and sprinkled the drops upon my forehead, and the appointed words were repeated. Aurelius kissed my brow, as I came forth from the water, and Athanasia also drew slowly near, and then hastily she pressed my forehead with her trembling lips.

We all sat down together by the lonely well ; and we sat in silence, for I could not be without many thoughts, partaken by none but myself, at the moment when I had thus, in the face of God and man, abjured the faith of all my fathers, and passed into the communion of the feeble, and despised, and persecuted few ; nor did either the priest or Athanasia essay to disturb my meditations. There were moments (for I must not conceal from you my weakness) in which I could scarcely help suspecting that I had done something that was wrong. I thought of my far distant mother ; and I could not reflect without pain upon the feelings with which I had every reason to suppose she, kind as she was, and merciful in all things, would have contemplated the scene which had passed. I thought of my dead parent too ; but that was with thoughts yet more serious and awful. The conviction of my own mind, in obedience to which I had acted, relieved me, however, from any feelings of self-reproach—"My father is dead, said I to myself—He died in ignorance, and he has not been judged according to the light which never shone upon him. But now—oh yes, it must be so—the darkness has passed from before his eyes ; and if the spirits of the departed ever visit, in the dim hours of silence,

those who were dear to them upon the earth, surely his venerable shade stood by smiling while the forehead of his son was laved with these blessed waters." Nor were these all that I thought of. Meantime, minutes—hours glided away, while troubled, and solemn, and tender thoughts thus occupied by turns my bosom. The old priest sat by me, his arms folded on his breast, gazing upward upon the spangled glories of the firmament. Athanasia was on the other side, close by the statue of the sleeping Naiad. From time to time, she leaned her cheek upon my shoulder; then she, too, would fix her eyes for a moment upon the untroubled beauty of the moon; and then the maiden would turn away from me, stooping over the brink of the fountain, and once and again I saw its calm dark waters rippled beneath her by the dropping of a tear.

"My dear children," said the good old Aurelius, after this silence had lasted for I know not how long, "methinks more sadness is among us than might suit the remembrance of what Providence has done for us, since the sun that went down upon much sorrow is about to rise upon so many fair hopes. I am old, but you are young; the world lies behind me, save a remnant I know not how brief. It lays all before you, and you have a light whereby to look upon it which my early day wanted. I trust that soon, very soon, ye shall both be far from this city—I say both, for I know well, go where ye may, ye will both go together. As for me, my lot is cast here, and here I will remain. Valerius, you must leave us betimes—you must return into the city, and consult with your friends and hers, how best Athanasia may be conveyed safely beyond the bounds of Italy. Cesar, indeed, rules everywhere; but at a distance from Rome suspicion is, at least, less watchful; and there is no precept given by which ye are bound to seek unnecessary perils."

"Aurelius," said I, "my dear father Aurelius, think not but that I have already been considering all these things anxiously. As soon as I have seen you safely placed within the retreat of which you have spoken to me, I shall hasten to Licinius my kinsman, who already, indeed, must be feeling no small anxiety from my absence.

I shall speak with him, and with both the Sempronii. My own errand to the capital I value as nothing, and I shall be ready on the instant, if Athanasia herself will consent to partake my voyage."

"She will," answered the good priest: "in her hour of most imminent peril, she confessed that she loved you. Athanasia will be your wife, and ye will both serve the Lord many days, amid the quiet valleys of your far off island. Nay, Athanasia, my dear child, do not weep, for these are not common days, and you must follow without fear the path which God's providence points out for your safety. Before ye go, my children, I myself shall join your hands in the name of our God."

Athanasia heard his words, and saw me gaze upon his face, but she made no reply, except by the tears which Aurelius rebuked, and a timid yet grave and serious pressure, with which she, when he had made an end of speaking, returned the fervid pressure of my hand upon hers.

"Children," said the old man, "there is no need of words when hearts are open: the tears that ye have shed together are the best earnest of the vows that ye shall ere long, I trust, pronounce. Yet, let no rashness attend your steps. The dawn must now be near, and Athanasia and I had better retire into our protecting covert. Valerius will leave us, and return at eventide. Till then, fasting and praying, we shall give thanks for our deliverance, and ask the aid that alone is precious for the time that yet remains."

I had fortunately brought all the way with me the lamp which lighted our steps down the mysterious staircase from the shrine of Apollo. Some little oil still remained within it, and Aurelius soon struck a light, and taking it in his hand, began to enter before us the dark cavern, by the mouth of which we had all this while been sitting. You, perhaps, have never heard of those strange excavations, the whole extent of which has probably never been known to any one person, but which appear, indeed, even as the priest had asserted, to be almost co-extensive with the great city beneath whose foundations they are placed. For what purpose they were at first dug is a subject which has long exercised the conjectures of those fond of pene-

trating into the origin of things, and the customs of antiquity. By some it is supposed, that in such caverns, winding far away into unseen recesses, the first rude inhabitants of Italy, like the Troglodytes of Upper Egypt and Ethiopia, had fixed their miserable abodes. Others assert that they owe their origin merely to the elder builders of the visible Rome, who, to avoid marring the surface of the earth, were contented to bring their materials of sand, clay, and stone from these subterraneous labyrinths, which so grew with the progress of diligence, and with the extension of the city itself. Perhaps both conjectures may have some foundation in truth; but be that as it may, there is no question that, in later times, these great catacombs have been widened and extended, to serve as places of burial for the mortal remains of the poor citizens; and this more particularly since the period when the Esquiline Hill was given by Augustus to his favourite Mecænas, and so purified from the pollutions to which allusion is frequent in the writings of Horace, and all the poets of the Republic. And now is it to be wondered at that here, in regions so obscure and dismal, the persecuted adherents of the new faith should have frequently sought, not only resting-places for the bodies of their dead, but even shelter for themselves, amid the darkness and cruelty of those relentless days? Hither, more than once, the old priest said, he had fled to escape the pursuit of his enemies—here once more he hoped the shield of safety would lie over his peril—here, at last, by whatever death he should die, his surviving brethren had promised to lay his bones in the earth, beside Thraso of Antioch, and many more that, in the bloody times of Nero and Domitian, had already, in the sight of all that heartless city, merited the crown, and the spotless robe, and the palm-branch of martyrdom, by patient endurance of the last insolence of man.

The old priest, therefore, held the lamp before us, and we entered those gloomy regions, wherein alone the servants of the Son of God could, at that troubled era, esteem themselves in safety from the hot pursuit of contemptuous power. We passed along beneath the dark arches of the rock-hewn roof, and between the long wind-

ing walls, on either side of which appeared many humble inscriptions, recording the virtues of the departed and the regrets of the surviving poor ;—of these last, however, as it appeared, all must long since have been gathered to the ashes of those whom they had lamented, for there was no semblance of any new monument among all that we observed ; and most of them, to judge from the shape of the letters upon them, must have been set up at least as long ago as the period of the death of Asinius. After traversing many of these long subterraneous galleries, we came at last to one narrower and more low-roofed than the rest, into which Aurelius struck aside, saying, “ Here Thraso lies—but no inscription marks the place where a Christian finds repose—here is the spot ; with my own hands I lent feeble help in digging the grave ; Athanasia, too, knows it well, for she also did not fear to assist in rendering the last honours to that soldier of Christ.”

A flat thin stone, without mark or epitaph, indicated the spot.

“ Let us sit here,” said Athanasia, “ let us sit here patiently till Valerius returns ; but how, when he is once gone from us, shall he ever be able to find us again among all the windings of this dark region ?”

“ He never could,” said the priest, “ neither he nor any one, I think ; and therein is our safety. But that matters not ; and yet, had I thought of it sooner, we might have spared him the trouble of entering our retreat along with us. The day, however, has not yet begun to dawn, and no time is lost ; for at this hour he might excite suspicion by being seen walking in the streets. We shall conduct him back again to the gate of the cavern, and then wait here till the darkness of evening makes it safe for him to seek us out again. But, first of all, he must assist me in lifting up this stone.”

I was a little surprised with this last proposition ; but seeing that the old man was in earnest, I, nevertheless, complied with his request. The stone yielded to our efforts, and I saw, when it was removed, a sword, a spear, and a brazen buckler, lying together upon the surface of the recently stirred earth. I took the sword in my hand, and offered it to Aurelius ; but he bid me lay that down,

for of such weapons he had no need. He then stooped himself, and lifted a small lamp of iron, which, with a cruise of oil, lay beside the weapons of the buried soldier. The lamp which we had brought with us could not have lasted much longer, so I was extremely relieved when I observed this new supply.

When I replaced the stone, however, I took care not to hide, for the present, the sword and the spear of Thraso. I laid them both at the feet of Athanasia ; and then leaving her by the funeral-stone, Aurelius and I retraced our steps to the mouth of the catacomb.

"Already," said he, as we came forth to the open air, "already the sky is red eastward—walk cautiously through the gardens, and regain with all speed the house of your kinsman. I need not preach diligence to you ; for you well know, that without your diligence, what has been done has all been done in vain. Go, my son ; may all blessings attend your steps. Come back at the rising of the moon, and cast a stone into the fountain, and I shall be within hearing. Go, and fear not."

CHAPTER XVI.

I PASSED without disturbance through the wide gardens of the Esquiline, and the streets of the city, in which no one was as yet moving, except a few rustics here and there, driving mules and asses laden with herbs to the market-place. When I reached the house of my kinsman, however, it was evident that sleep did not prevail within its gates ; for lights were visible in the vestibule, the gates of which, as could be by no means usual at such an hour, stood half-open to the way. I entered, and found Dromo, and several more of the domestic slaves, sitting in conversation with the porter ; while, apart from them, appeared Boto walking up and down, and visibly occupied with something quite different from what formed the subject of their discourses.

He could not conceal the extravagance of his satisfaction on seeing me enter among them in safety ; so that I had no doubt his brother had informed him, in so far at least, of the strange scenes that had passed after our leaving him in the Mammertine at the beginning of the evening. Nor was Dromo the Cretan much behind him in many marks of satisfaction. The two affectionate slaves received me, in short, with the warmest demonstrations of joy, and conducted me together to the chamber of Licinius, in which I found a company assembled, the whole of whom, it was sufficiently manifest, had been waiting all the night in expectation of seeing or hearing from me. The orator himself was there—and young Sextus, pale with watching—and Sabinus, still habited in his full military attire, with a goblet of wine before him on the table—and, last of all, Lucius Sempronius, who was reclining in the corner of the room, at some little distance from the rest. It was he who eagerly and aloud began to question me the moment I came in ; and I knew from the style in which he spake, that all my friends who were present had already been made aware of the singular manner in which Athanasia and the old priest had been withdrawn from the council-chamber of the Palatine. A few words informed them of what had followed after we quitted the temple of Apollo, and of the obscure retreat in which I had just parted from the fugitives.

“ I thank the gods,” said Sempronius,—“ so far at least it goes well ; but if this strictness, of which the centurion speaks, shall be adhered to, there still must be no small difficulty about conveying the girl beyond the city.”

“ In truth,” quoth Sabinus, after a little pause, “ I am afraid this is scarcely a matter in regard to which I should be consulted. I know not but already I have done several things that could not be quite reconciled with my duty. I shall, in all probability, be set on the watch myself ; and if so—much as I must regret the necessity—it certainly will be most necessary for me to discharge what is committed to my trust. Is there no possibility, think you, of inventing some impenetrable disguise ? Depend on it, it is quite impossible the young lady should remain anywhere in Rome, without being ere long discovered. The first thing is to have her safe beyond the city-walls.”

"I myself," said I, "shall embark instantly for Britain. Sempronius, Athanasia must go with me: surely it may be possible to have her carried unobserved to the shore."

"You!" quoth Licinius—"you embark instantly for Britain! You know not what you say, my dear boy; your lawsuit has been determined this very afternoon, and you must not think of leaving Rome at the moment of such magnificent success. The great Valerian villa, and every thing that Cneius left, is your own."

"By Jove!" cried Sabinus, "did ever any mortal receive such a piece of news with such a face as this! But come, here is health to the lord of the great Valerian villa, and may this Massic choke me, if I don't love him the better for all his gravity."

"Would to heaven!" said Sempronius, "our young friend had loved as truly as he does under happier auspices! I am the last man in Rome who would wish to see him sacrificing the prospects that have but just opened themselves upon him. No, no, Valerius must stay and take possession of the palace of his ancestors, destined, as I hope he is, to equal, under the favour of the gods, the noblest name among all their line. My dear niece—let us trust she may be concealed somewhere in safety from the pursuit. Separated from this Aurelius, and the rest of this fanatic crew, she will ere long, without question, abandon the dreams they have filled her mind withal; and then, on some future happier day, our dear friend may perhaps have no reason either to fear or to blush for lifting her over the threshold of the Valerii. Their loves have been already well proved in trouble; let us hope that the merciful gods may yet reward them in prosperity."

I drew near to the old man when he had said this, and receiving his embrace, whispered into his ear, "Sempronius, you speak generously; but know that this very evening I also have become a Christian."

"Heavens!" cried he, "what limits shall ever be affixed to this contagion!—every day the madness seizes upon some noble victim. Rash, rash boy! have you not seen already to what consequences this must lead?"

"What is it? what is it?" says Licinius; "what new

calamity is this? Have my ears deceived me, or did I hear aright what afflicts me more than any thing of all that has yet happened? Speak, dear Caius, speak, and, for the sake of all the Roman blood that is in your veins, undo this suspicion! Swear that I heard not your whisper well! swear to me, that you have not embraced this phrensy!"

"My friends," said I, "why should I speak to one, when all of you are, I well know, alike interested in every thing that concerns me? Neither rashly, nor hastily, nor in phrensy, nor in any madness, but calmly and deliberately, after many struggles and much reflection, I have at length been satisfied that this faith, of which you think so contemptuously, is the only true faith; and that in it alone, now that it has been proclaimed to the world, the immortal hopes of mankind are reposed. Seek not to argue with me, for, ignorant as ye are as to this matter, it is impossible that you should speak wisely or well concerning it. In all things else I bow to the opinion of age and understanding so much above my own; but here I have thought for myself, and my faith is fixed."

Licinius looked upon me, while I spake so, with a countenance full of painful and anxious emotion. In the eye of young Sextus I saw a tear ready to start, and his whole aspect was that of one sad and bewildered. Sempronius leaned his brow upon his hand, and turned himself away from me. But as for the centurion, he preserved his usual air, without much alteration either in one way or another; and after a moment, all the rest continuing silent, he whispered to me across the table, "By Jove, Valerius, I have been in love myself ere now, and perhaps am not out of the scrape just at present; but, I must confess to you, you have thrown quite a new light upon the matter. Why, man, do but consider with yourself for a moment; how do you suppose the whole world has been going on for Heaven knows how many thousand years? What do you fancy to be the great merits of the present age, that it should be treated with more favour than all that have gone before it? And if you come to speak of the Jews—by Castor! I never was in their country, but everybody knows they are the most pitiful, black-hearted,

absurd, mean, knavish set of creatures that ever the world was disgraced with. They were always by the ears among themselves ; but I think it is rather too much that they should have the credit of bringing their betters (by which I mean all the world besides) into confusion. You may think as you please, but, depend upon it, I understand much more of their character than you do ; and rely upon me, my dear fellow, there is neither honour nor wisdom of any kind to be got by consorting with them. In fact, granting all the present disturbance were over, and these people allowed to follow their own devices without any one's interfering with them, I have my doubts whether your best friends could continue to keep company with you if you persisted in being one of them. I am sure nobody will be more sorry than I ; but really, to speak honestly, I think I am sure you will quite ruin your character if you don't instantly dismiss all this nonsense from your mind. And as for the young lady—I have seen many of them extremely superstitious (though not, to be sure, after this Christian fashion), and I never yet knew one of them who did not become wonderfully less so after she was fairly settled in life, and got a husband to be kind to her, look ye, children to be whipped, and a household to be scolded. Come, come, remember you are but green in the ways of the world yet ; and all this will blow over anon, and you will laugh more heartily than any one else when you think of your weakness ; but any folly is excusable after all in a young lover ; that is to say, man, provided it don't last too long. Come, come, a Christian, quotha ! By Jove ! I would almost as soon have suspected myself of this as you. But look up, my good friend ; I don't think you are listening to me."

"My dear Sabinus," said I, "I do listen, but I think it is rather to the gay Prætorian than to the patient friend I expected to have found in you."

"Poh ! poh !" said he, again ; "you take every thing so seriously. If you are resolved to be a Christian, I am very sorry for it ; but neither that, nor any thing of the sort, shall ever stand between me and a true friend. I hope you will soon see the thing as I do—I know you will ; but in the mean time, Valerius, you may count upon

me—I assure you, you may.” And in so saying, the kind man squeezed my hand with all his customary fervour.

He then turned round to the rest of our friends, who were still as silent as ever, and began, with the warmest zeal, to propose for their consideration a dozen different schemes of escape that had already suggested themselves to his imagination.

“One thing, however,” said he, “is, in the first place, absolutely indispensable; and that is, that we should have a bark in readiness at Ostium, or somewhere else; but there I think it would be least likely to attract any particular observation. We must have the ship quite ready,—manned, and victualled, and all; and she could set sail perhaps by night, and be off the coast before any one thinks of inquiring after her. And if you once get to Corsica, or Sicily, or any place beyond Italy, your way to Britain will lie quite smooth before you, and no one will think of offering the smallest interruption. But what do you think the young lady would be most likely to fancy during the voyage—I mean in the way of eating? We must take particular care as to that: you must on no account allow yourselves to be run so short as we were the last time. By Jove! the taste of that old biscuit is scarcely out of my mouth yet.”

Even Sempronius could not help smiling, when he perceived into what channel the thoughts of the provident centurion had turned themselves; and Licinius also smiled: but he soon recalled our attention to matters of more serious moment. He expressed himself, first of all, in terms of the deepest regret concerning the state into which my mind had been brought; but he had too much delicacy to hint—what, nevertheless, I have no doubt he would have done had I been absent—that he considered my love for Athanasia as having been the chief instrument of what he called my most unfortunate perversion. He passed then, at great length, into an account of the speech he had delivered on the preceding afternoon before the court of the Centumviri, of the arguments by which he had satisfied the judges as to the justice of my claims, of the applauses with which he had been listened to, and of the unhesitating manner, so gratifying to his feelings, in which the

favourable judgment of the court had been pronounced. For some moments, in his earnest detail of all these judicial proceedings, he seemed almost to have lost sight of the present situation and views of the person most interested in their termination. But then, when in the progress of his story he came to describe and enlarge upon the magnificence of my new possessions—the wide domains in Africa—the rich farms in Sicily—the thousands of slaves that were engaged in their cultivation—the Spanish silver mine—and, last of all, the splendours of the great villa upon the banks of Tiber, its gardens, its baths, its porticoes, its rich furniture, its paintings, its statues, its libraries, and I know not how many particulars besides—it was not difficult to perceive that he could scarcely think, without absolute indignation, of the person who, having but just become the master of all these things, could consent to abandon them for the sake of a pretty girl and a fantastic delusion. Had Sempronius not been there among his friends, I suspect he might have expressed himself rather more bitterly; but as it stood, it was quite impossible not to be aware of the thoughts that were uppermost in his mind. He concluded with saying, in a tone that bordered very nearly upon derision, “And such are the realities which our young friend quits for the reasons he has mentioned! Well, every man must judge for himself. If it must be so, let it be so.”

I heard him patiently to the end, and then said, “You have well summed up the whole matter, my dear Licinius. It must indeed be so, therefore let it be so: and if you love me, as how should I doubt you do, let it be without any further discussion of this kind, which I have already told you can be productive of no good effect: that is to say, of no effect which you, in your present state of opinion, could consider as good. I go immediately to Britain, and I trust she—for whom I would leave all these things, were they millions of times greater than they are—shall, by the aid of your kindness, go with me in safety. There is one request only which I have, in addition to all this, to lay before you; and that you may hear it the more patiently, it does not concern myself.

“In a word, then,” I continued, “should happier days

arrive, I hope once more to be among you here in Rome. The wealth which, thanks to your zeal, Licinius, is this day mine, can be of little use to me in the British valley to which, for the present, I retire. Above all, this beautiful villa of which you speak—why, because for a time I am unable to occupy it, should the mansion of my fathers stand empty, when there are others among their descendants who lie not under the same necessity of exile? Till I am enabled to breathe in freedom the air of Rome, I trust Licinius will consent to let Sextus represent me in my villa. There, too, I hope Sempronius will permit his daughter to be. It will give pleasure to Athanasia and myself to think, when we are far away in our solitary valley, that those magnificent halls contain the dearest of our friends. When we come back, if ever we do so, they will not grudge to make room for us beneath the same roof with themselves. Lucius—Sempronius, what say you?"

They were both silent for a moment; but Sabinus was at hand to answer for them.

"By all Olympus! I shall knock down any man henceforth who in my presence abuses Christianity as a destruction of men's hearts. Let it be, my good friends, as our dear Caius says. Let it be so. I know, Sextus, I have at least your voice upon my side. Let it be so; and for heaven's sake, let it be immediately. In my humble opinion, they ought to be married this very evening. It will go very hard if we can't contrive it so that Valerius and Athanasia may have a peep of the procession ere they embark. But I have been forgetting what I think is almost of equal importance. Our friends won't think of setting off without some ceremony of the same sort for themselves; will they?"

Our conversation was interrupted by Dromo, who told me that Silo the jailer had come to see me, and was below in the hall. There I found the humane man with his little daughter in his hand, and walked aside with him into the inner portico of the house. I told him how the escape, for which his zeal alone was to be thanked, had been terminated, and where Athanasia and Aurelius were waiting an opportunity of being conveyed beyond the city; and

then inquired whether no suspicion had been attached to himself in consequence of his absence from the Capitoline. He assured me that he had no reason to think any such suspicion had been excited ; but added, that after having been engaged in such an affair, he could by no means consider it proper for himself to continue any longer in the situation which he held.

“ The oath which I had taken to Trajan,” said he, “ prevented me from adopting the easier and simpler course of setting open for our dear friends the gates of the Mammertine ; and I trust that I did not offend against that oath by acting as I did, after they had been taken away for the time from my keeping. But both they and you must be alike aware of the pain which I suffered during their confinement, and of the dangers which I have encountered by giving my aid to their escape. I am resolved no more to be subject to such struggles. I cannot preserve my faith as a Christian and my honour as a servant of Trajan, liable, as you too well see I am, to be made an instrument in the hand of oppression for the persecution of those whose only crime is adherence to the same faith into which I myself have been baptized. This very day I resign my charge in the Mammertine ; this very night, if it so please you, I am ready to accompany you and my dear young lady, in your flight to Britain. There I shall, at least, be able to console the old age of my parents—there I shall sit by the same fireside with my brother—there I shall bring up my child in peace, and teach her young lips to repeat the name of her Saviour. Do not refuse my request, Valerius. I thirst for the repose of my native valley. I am weary of prisons and palaces, and blood and danger. I pray you, let me go with you—and lay my bones, when I die, beside the quiet waters of Anton, in which I bathed when I was a stripling.”

I need not say with what gladness I heard this proposal from Silo. Indeed, the thought immediately occurred to me, that, so far from being any impediment, he might be of the most essential use to us in forwarding our scheme of evasion. I left him, therefore, for a moment, and returning to my friends, informed them of what I had just heard, and of the hopes which I was inclined to entertain. The

whole of them, perceiving now at last, from the way in which I had spoken, that there was no chance of diverting me from my project, entered, like true friends, into serious consultation respecting the best method of carrying my project into execution. The aid of Silo, who had already given such proofs both of his presence of mind, and of his prudence, and of his courage, was regarded by them as affording promise of the highest importance. He was shortly summoned to take part in our consultation, and after much being said and considered, it was at last resolved that he, the jailer, after resigning in a formal manner the office he held, and transferring his property for the present into the custody of Licinius, should forthwith repair to Ostium, and there hire and put in readiness, for immediate use, a small vessel, the lightest he could find, in which the whole of the fugitive party might transport themselves at least as far as Corsica. To this proposal the zealous Silo without hesitation assented. It was agreed that he should have the mariners on their benches by the coming on of night, and that he himself should be waiting for us by a certain ruined tower, which stands conspicuously on a projecting rock by the riverside, about a mile and a half above Ostium. There he should be hailed by me, and from thence he should himself conduct us to the bark, which, the moment we reached it, should be put in motion to pass out from the harbour. We left it to Silo himself to stock the bark with any merchandise which he might deem best adapted to deceive both the mariners themselves and the superintendents of the haven.

All these things being so arranged, nothing more remained for me but to provide suitable disguises for Athanasia and the priest, and some plausible pretext, by means of which the vigilance of the nightly guardians of the city-gates might be overcome. I had still some difficulty to encounter before I could prevail on Sempronius and Licinius to give their consent for celebrating so hastily the nuptials of Sextus. But this also was in the end accomplished; and it was determined that the bride should be carried home, not to Licinius's house in the city, but to my villa on Tiber—where, after having passed the barriers,

Athanasia and I might hope to pause for some brief space, in our descent of the river—and so bid adieu, under circumstances of happier omen, to all the friends for whose sake either of us could be likely to regret our departure from Rome.

CHAPTER XVII.

I HAD been then but a few days in the capital of the world, and every hope of my bosom depended upon my succeeding in an attempt to quit its walls this evening ; yet you do not imagine that my hours were spent in contemplation of the city, the magnificence of which, nevertheless, might be said to be still new and unfamiliar to my provincial eyes. The truth is, that, to say nothing of the interests which alone had power to occupy my secret mind, I had many engagements, in which, as I was at that moment situated, it was absolutely necessary I should consume a very considerable part of the day. Perhaps it might be well for me that it was so, for to return to the Esquiline before the fall of night was entirely out of the question ; and had no external occupations been forced upon me, I should have done nothing, without doubt, but walk up and down the long porticoes of my kinsman's mansion, tormenting myself with unprofitable dreams, and perhaps disturbing for Sextus the happiness of a day, which it was the second wish of my heart he should never cease to regard as among the happiest of his life. I say, therefore, it was perhaps well, in every point of view, that, partly from the necessity of making provision of various kinds for my expected voyage, but still more in consequence of the lawsuit, with the termination of which you have just been made acquainted, I had no leisure that day, from which to work out unnecessary pain either for myself or for others.

First of all, I had to assist Licinius in looking over an infinity of deeds connected with the large possessions

my right to which had now been ascertained ; and to superintend the drawing out of others, by which I constituted him for the present my representative over all my Italian estates, and conveyed to his son the right of commanding, as might please him, every thing about my great villa in the neighbourhood of the city, and the numerous slaves, both rural and domestic, attached to its precincts. In the next place, I had to go to the Forum for the purpose of manumitting some slaves (such a largess being naturally expected on my accession) ; and while I was occupied with this, need I tell you that my own poor Briton was not forgotten ? Licinius having, at the joint request of Sextus and myself, accorded that morning to the Cretan also the well-merited gift of his liberty, Boto and Dromo were seen strutting about the Forum together for some moments, each of them arrayed in that worshipful cap which had for so many years formed, without doubt, the most prominent object in all their day-dreams of felicity. I shall not trouble you with needless particulars. Let it suffice, that the greater part of the day was thus spent by me in unavoidable business ; that towards supper-time I found the household of Licinius in mighty confusion, in consequence of the preparations for the approaching nuptials of young Sextus ; and that, chiefly to avoid occasioning any additional trouble at my kinsman's home, I once more accepted the invitation of the centurion, and became his guest at the Prætorian camp ; but not in the *Julius*, the noisy revels of which would have in nowise accorded with the spirits of one already fatigued as I was with much bodily watching, and still more grievously worn out by the pressure of mental anxieties.

I supped with the kind Prætorian, therefore, in his own private chamber, where, excepting only that he could not entirely refrain from touching now and then upon what he called my Jewish dream, his conversation was the kindest of all balsams that could have been applied to my feverish bosom. What he dwelt upon most fervently, however, was the probability—the certainty he seemed to esteem it—that a persecution of this nature could not be long persisted in by such a prince

as Trajan ; and the pleasure with which, that being all at an end, he should see me come back to Rome, and take due possession of the inheritance of my fathers. After expatiating most fluently for some minutes on the expected delights of that day, he paused suddenly, and then added, in a tone of some little hesitation, " And as for me, I wonder in what state you shall find me. Rich or poor—married or single—centurion or tribune—one thing is certain, that I shall, in all circumstances, be not a little rejoiced to see you."

" You had better marry, my good captain," said I.

" Marry ! me to marry ! I have not the least thought of such a thing. You did not put any faith, did you, in the raillery of those waggish fellows of yesterday ?"

" A little—a very little, Sabinus."

" Poh ! poh ! now you are jesting."

" And much, very much, Sabinus, in the conscious looks of a certain blushing centurion, yesterday."

" Come, come," quoth he, " there is more cunning in these British eyes of yours, after all, than I ever should have dreamed of. Fill your cup to the brim, boy ; and since you are to leave us so speedily, I shall e'en have no secrets for you."

I did as I was bid, and nodded in signal that I was in readiness to listen.

" You smile," said he ; " by Jove, the boy laughs ! What would you have me do ? Look you, Valerius, I don't pretend to think I am much fallen from my prime yet. I have seen service ;—true, but what of that ? I have kept a light heart in all my campaigns, my boy, and I think I can still dance an old step, sing an old ditty, and drink a cup of old Falernian, when it suits my fancy, with the best of them. But my day, it must be confessed, begins to wear a little, a very little towards the evening ; and, Castor ! if you allow supper-time to slip over, I don't know but you must go to bed with a light stomach. Now or never was the word, my boy ; and the widow is mine own. I shall wed her in less than a month ; for I was resolved poor old Leberinus (my dear friend !)—I was determined he should have fair play at my hands—I was resolved nothing should encroach upon his twelve-months—"

"And Xerophrastes?" said I.

"And as for the most sagacious and venerable Xerophrastes, why, to tell you the truth, I see nothing for him but that he should allow his beard to curl as it pleases, drop his long cloak over his ambitious pair of shanks, forswear moonlight, purchase for himself a dark lantern instead, and see whether he can't find, within the four walls of Rome, an honest Greek, and a constant widow, to make one blessed wedding withal. That is my advice to the stoic—stoic no longer; but, if there be hoops upon a tub, the most cynical of all cynics. Methinks I already hear him snarling. Diogenes was but the Philip that went before this Alexander."

"Poor Xerophrastes!" said I; "I confess I, for my share, can scarcely help pitying him. The conceit of the moonlight scene was certainly quite too much; but, to speak honestly, did it not appear to you, at one time, as if the widow were very much disposed to listen?"

"My dear boy," quoth the centurion, "did you ever chance, having no profounder occupation, to spend a forenoon, saving your dignity, in looking over the parapet of a bridge?"

"Perhaps I may, Sabinus; but, if I did, I am sure I never saw either Xerophrastes or the pretty widow in the water, believe me."

"Well, I like that, I confess," quoth he again; "but tell me this, Valerius, did you ever see a pretty bunch of yellow straw, or a beautiful peacock's feather, or any other light gewgaw of terrestrial nature, wafted gently from beneath the arch, and about to plunge away into the more rapid course of the river? You nod; well, did you ever chance, being a bit of a philosopher after your fashion, as we all see you are, to take notice of a certain little, balancing, hesitating, charming indecision, which such a gewgaw takes a pleasure in exhibiting at such a moment? How the sweet toy will slumber for a minute on the smooth glassy surface of the water, immediately under the shadow of the bridge, as if not able at once to make up its mind into which of the three or four diverging streams, that all part just from about that point, it may be most becoming, or most prudent, or most

agreeable to commit itself? I have seen a blue and red feather keep half a dozen streams rippling away, like so many rivals, for as much time as would suffice to roast an oyster in the shell;—and, pray now, when the coquetry was at last over, and the pretty bauble had plunged into its fate, to which of the competing currents do you think it paid the best compliment?"

"You flow so fast, my dear Sabinus," said I, "that I can scarce follow the stream of your discourse. You 'rush so immense,' as Horace has it, that you lose not a little of your clearness. You are the most Pindaric of Prætorians."

"You are dull, Valerius—no offence to you—I mean you provincials are always a little dull; but, to level the whole matter to your comprehension, in case you had been so lucky as to be one of the half-dozen lovers among whom the beauty (I crave pardon, I mean the heiress of Leberinus) distributed the smiles of her widowhood—I ask you a very simple question—Whether would you have liked better to be one of those she had some thoughts of, or *the one* she did wed? I assure you, I am quite satisfied with the result of the affair; that is to say, provided she don't change her mind before the moon, that old type of widows, has trimmed her horns again, and set forth her broad smiling face, to light up once more the heavens that have so often witnessed her distress and her consolation."

"You talk of the moon," said I, "my dear Sabinus; I pray you look out and see how the evening wears. Think you not I might venture to walk towards the Esquiline?"

The centurion went out into the portico, and came back with the intelligence that there were clouds about the sky, but that he thought the moon could not fail to be up ere long.

"You shall go, therefore, my dear boy," said he, "you shall go forthwith to the Esquiline; and what is more, I will go with you."

"I will on no account suffer you," I replied; "what would Trajan say, if he ever came to discover it?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, I believe Trajan would

say very little ; that is, provided the storm were once blown over a little. I had some talk with himself last night, after that ingenious rescue of yours, and at first he spoke very bitterly ; but when once he understood how the thing had been managed, he said there could be no doubt it was done by some of their Christian friends ; and added, that, after all, the fellows, whoever they were, might have killed both himself and old Palma into the bargain, if they had had a mind. This idea seemed in some measure to soften him, and he told me something—I am sure you will stare when I repeat it to you—he told me that he had heard several stories very much to the credit of Athanasia, and among the rest, what think you he particularized, but the very story which you yourself told me you had heard from that goldsmith fellow in the barber's shop, the night we slept at my father's ! Do you remember a certain swarthy man, who sat apart in the corner and asked questions about the Christians ? I did not see him, but Virro spoke about him after I rejoined you."

"I do—I do ; and I remember that he spoke in private some words to the goldsmith, and that the goldsmith looked very confused when the interview was at an end."

"No wonder—no wonder—the stranger, I will lay a year's pay on't, was no other than Trajan himself. And that story, and one or two things besides, had rendered him, I have a strong notion, extremely well disposed to deal lightly with Athanasia, could she have been prevailed upon to make but the least appearance of concession. And even now, I dare say, he is not in secret so very sorry about *her* escape ; but that is little to the purpose, at least for the present. You know the prefect has set a price both upon her and the old man, and I promise you it is such a temptation as no virtue, that keeps watch beneath any common Prætorian breastplate, could well be trusted to wrestle withal. But let us hope the best. Let us hope that they have lain snug and unsuspected—as why should we doubt they have done ? And here, do you once more take this helmet and cloak, and remember that the password of to-night is *Titus*—

for there is no saying but one or more of these things may prove of some little use to you. Take the sword with you too, man—and here I am ready to attend you myself. And look ye—you, lover, as you are, would never once have thought of what is the most essential of all—here is a skinful of good wine, my boy. I promise you they must stand in much need of it, after spending a whole day, and a whole night to boot, in that murderous funereal region. I protest to you I never was there; but I take these catacombs, from your description of them, to be not much better than a second Tartarus.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

Thus provided with all things that seemed to be necessary for our purpose, we were just about to quit the camp of the Prætorians, when a soldier of the guard presented to my friend a billet; which he had no sooner read than I saw plainly it contained some intelligence extremely disagreeable, if not alarming to him. He seized hastily his sword, and clasping his helmet upon his head, said, in a voice of much agitation, “Come, Valerius, we have been dallying here too long. I know not what troubles you may yet have to encounter.”

The tone of his voice, and the distraction of his gestures, inspired me with I know not what of obscure dread. I felt as if I could not muster courage to interrogate him as to what he had heard, but followed him silently with rapid steps, as he moved across the Prætorian court, and so onward by the city-wall towards the southern side of the Esquiline.

The streets of the city were all alive with the blaze of lights, and the sounds of merriment. Here crowds of idle people stood laughing around the stage of an Etrurian mountebank; there a fire was kindled by the wayside,

and dust-covered labourers were forgetting the toils of the day, as they sat around frying their fish among its embers; on one side was an old cripple, around whom knots of women and children were gathered, while he sung with a gay voice, leaning upon his crutch, the glories of some great day on which the Dacians were humbled and the Danube ran red with blood; on the other hand, drum and clarion invited all who could command three sesterces to witness the wonderful feats of the most sagacious elephant that had ever been disabled at the amphitheatre of Vespasian. Here sleek men were visible within booths of canvass, knocking down "slaves—strong slaves from the north," to the highest bidders; there a squeaking hag was giving out a full and particular account of the mule that foaled, and the calf that had been brought forth with the head of a serpent, and the three fiery meteors that had descended into the court of the Mamertine; and of all the other rueful signs and portents that had appeared at the moment when Cotilius, the Christian traitor, lost his head; also how the earth had yawned and swallowed up suddenly another hardened Christian, and a young enchantress that was his mistress, although he called her his daughter. All, in short, were busy, and most seemed to be light of heart; and no one regarded us, as we rushed along those crowded ways, on towards the dark pine-groves and deserted alleys of the Esquiline gardens.

We approached the clump of thick trees, in the centre of which the cavern is situated, and forced our way again through its entangled underwood. But now the space within was not illuminated as before by a brilliant moon, for, as I have already mentioned, the sky this evening was cloudy; there was light enough, nevertheless, to show, not only the poplar bushes that hung over the mouth of the grotto, but what I saw, alike with astonishment and alarm, two human figures, neither of them evidently such as I had expected to find in that region—one laid recumbent by the side of the fountain, the other pacing backward and forward, immediately in front of the entrance of the cavern.

At the first glance, as I have said, I perceived too

plainly that these were not the Christian priest and Athanasia; but who or what they were, it required more examination before I could form any conjecture. I stood with the centurion just within the edge of the woody screen, that on every side surrounded the open space,—and I stood for a moment in the breathless silence of consternation.

“Ha!” whispered he—“ha! Rubellia; too just has been your information. Perdition seize that infernal witch!”

“Pona!” said I; “alas! Sabinus, is that Pona who lies crouching there among the grass?”

“It is she—it is no other than she—and, confusion gape upon her cunning! there is a Prætorian soldier by her side. Alas, my dear Caius, what is to be done? Without question, a party is within searching the catacombs.”

“Ha!” I whispered, unsheathing my sword, “let us run, Sabinus—let us rush after them into the cavern.”

“Hush!” he replied; “put up your blade, rash boy. Do you forget who I am? Do you think it is for me to stand by and see you draw your sword upon the soldier of the prince?”

“Stand still, dear Sabinus,” said I; “stand where you are. Let me at least seek to bribe the soldier. You will not refuse to keep watch here, and prevent the witch from making her escape?”

“Valerius,” said he, “I am your friend, but I cannot be witness of any of these things; I will wait beyond the thicket. Heaven grant I see you soon.”

The centurion, so saying, retreated; and I waited where I was till he had gained the exterior of the thicket. I then returned my blade into the scabbard, leaped forth boldly, and immediately accosted the soldier. He took me, of course, for one of his own order, and answered me without hesitation.

“Have they found them?” said I; “have they not yet discovered them, comrade?”

“They have been gone for some minutes,” he replied, “but I have heard nothing. But as for you, I hope you don’t mean to claim any share in the reward? Come,

brother, fair play—fair play in all things. The chance is ours for this once. I pray you, walk away, like an honest fellow, and I promise you, for my part, as good a supper, and as jolly a skinful, as heart can desire.”

“I wish none of your reward,” said I; “but permit me to enter the cavern.”

“Do, at your peril,” quoth the witch, lifting herself suddenly from the ground—“give him entrance at your peril; and, first of all, look at his face, and see if ever you beheld it before beneath the shadow of a helmet.”

The man drew near to me, and gazing upon my countenance, said, very sourly, “By my faith! brother, I think the old woman is in the right. Pray, when did you first wear that garb, brother? Yes, and, by Jupiter, I think the headpiece should belong of right to nothing lower than a centurion. Of what band, an it please you, may you be captain?”

“Soldier,” said I, “there is no use in attempting to deceive you. I am neither soldier nor captain; but here is a purse of ten gold Neroes, which you may thrust under your girdle, if you will but give me permission to follow your comrades into that cavern.”

“Agreed,” quoth the soldier, dropping the point of his spear upon the ground, “agreed, my good friend; you speak as reasonably, I think, as any centurion among them all.”

I reached him the purse, and he, after balancing it in his hand for a moment, placed it underneath his cincture. I was then stepping forward to the mouth of the grotto; but the man instantly lifted up his spear, and, bursting into a loud laugh of scorn, said, “No, no, my good friend, that would be carrying the joke a little—just a very little too far. In the mean time, let it content you to sit down here quietly; for may Jove devote me, but I believe you will turn out to be not much less than a Christian yourself; in which case, good brother of mine, these are not all the pieces for which I shall have to thank you.”

“Thief, robber, traitor, base traitor!” I cried, and drew my sword. He stepped a pace backward, and stood in front of the fountain, his spear stretched forth towards me in his hand. “Foul robber,” I cried, “guard, or die!”

and before his thrust could reach my bosom, I had cloven asunder the shaft of his weapon, and the steel point fell at my feet among the grass, and my blade was close to his throat. He clapped his hand upon the hilt of his sword, and I struck.

He stumbled, and the well was immediately behind him, and he fell headlong backward. I leaped upon his breast—his helmet sunk beneath the water—I stamped upon his writhing breast;—strongly, fiercely, the dying caitiff struggled; but the struggle was brief. I stamped—I stamped with terrible strength—and the water ceased to ripple about my feet, for I stood but on a piece of clay. A dagger, at that moment, struck from behind upon me; but the armour was true, and I only staggered from the blow. Pona flung her poniard at me with the energy of a maniac, and darted from me—howling, shrieking, screaming curses—into the dark mouth of the cavern.

I rushed after her, my bloody sword in my hand,—I rushed as if on the wings of a tempest, into the dark cave that yawned before me—I rushed blindly, but I heard the footsteps of the flying witch, and I followed them like a bloodhound.

I gained apace upon the hag—the air brushed cool upon me, from the flapping of her garments. I touched—once and again I touched the skirts of her mantle. My hand grasped her throat—she screamed as if death had been in the touch. I arrested her flight, and relaxing for a moment my strong grasp, said to her, passing my wet blade at the same moment across her cheek, “One breath more, and you die. Lead me truly, and I give you your life—lead me truly, Pona, and I swear to you you shall live.”

The witch trembled in my gripe, and answering nothing, began in silence to move onward. The place was dark, dark as midnight, but she seemed, even in her mortal terror, to have possession of some instinct that made her tread as surely as if she had been walking under the open light of noonday. She walked on; she turned; she walked again forward. At last a ray of light gleamed upon me from the distant recesses of the gloom. “Tread gently,” I whispered, letting her feel again the bloody

weapon. She obeyed, and trod softly, yet swiftly, and more swiftly.

We reached the low-browed arch which leads to the sepulchre of Thraso. I looked; a soldier stood with his back turned towards me, supporting himself upon his sword. On the ground before him lay old Aurelius, pale, fainting, propped upon his hand; beside him stood Athanasia, erect, holding aloft in her hand a sword—the sword of dead Thraso—scarlet to the hilt; her face deadly pale, but her eyes gleaming like the eyes of a young lioness guarding her young; her long hair streaming wildly behind her from off her high marble brow.

I dashed the groaning witch upon the ground before me, and seized, at the same moment, from behind, the arm with which the Prætorian was leaning upon his weapon. The man resisted not, but dropped feebly upon his knees, his support being thus hastily withdrawn. Athanasia lifted her sword yet higher over her head, and said, "More! yet more!" and then looking again, she recognised me on the instant, and dropping her bloody blade upon the ground, she rushed into my embrace.

"O Athanasia!" said I, "what have you done? What an hour is this!"

"God will judge me!" she replied; "surely he only strengthened me when I saw Aurelius struck to the ground by the blow of the soldier. O Valerius, I am faint to death! Oh! let us leave this dark place, if yet there be any hope before us. Let us leave this place of blood and darkness."

"Go, go, my children," said Aurelius, lifting himself half-up from the tombstone on which he was lying; "go, go, my dear children, and the Lord lighten your steps!"

"My father, my dear father!" said the maiden; "oh! I fear your wound is deep; let us bear you to the open air. Valerius, haste; haste, Caius, let us lift him to the fountain, for, both with long fasting and this sad blow, our father is faint."

"No, no," said the old man, "it is all in vain, it is all over; leave me, leave me here with Thraso—here will I lie best. But now I thirsted for the sweet air of heaven;

and now—I thirst no more ! I am feeble, feeble, my children : the old blood flows slowly, but the wound is deep. You said well the wound is deep ; blessed be the name of the Lord !” The old man, with these words, sunk down again quite prostrate.

“Lift him, lift him, Caius ; let us lift him together,” said Athanasia. I did lift the pale old man, and he regarded me while I was doing so with a dim unconscious eye. Athanasia took the lamp, and leaving the wounded soldier and the witch together, we essayed, with what speed we could muster, to gain once more the entrance of the grotto. The marks of my feet, wet from the fountain, conducted us better than we could have had any reason to expect ; and at length the penetrating breath of the night air indicated that we drew near to the object of our desire.

Athanasia started, and uttered a scream of terror, when she beheld over-against the mouth of the grotto another person in the military garb, standing distinct in the moonlight ; and I also started. “But fear not,” said I, looking steadfastly ; “now you have no cause to fear ; ’tis my friend, the kind centurion Sabinus.”

The anxious centurion met us, as we came forth, with a most troubled air, but asked not one question concerning what had passed in his absence. Perceiving only that, by whatever means, we had escaped from the dangers of the cavern, he hesitated not to offer every assistance in his power for the completion of our projected scheme ; but Athanasia thought of nothing at that moment but the wounded priest.

We laid him gently down upon the long grass, by the margin of the fountain, and Sabinus poured wine into his mouth, and water upon his face ; and after a moment the old man revived, and opened his eyes in such a manner that we all began to entertain some hope his wound might not prove fatal.

It was, however, but for a moment ; it was but the gleam in the socket—the last faint flutter of the expiring flame. Yet who can tell how much may be compressed into the farewell moments of life ? Oh, who can tell how much of fear may be mingled with how much of

hope in the brief shallow draught of the unresisted cup? In dreams, years seem at times to pass on the wings of a moment. Who shall tell whether, when the body hangs already loose upon the parting soul, the same energy may not be exerted for sorrow, for joy, for memory, for foresight?

The old man propped himself upon his left hand, and Athanasia, leaning close to him, supported his hoary head upon her bosom. "Look up," said she, "my dear father! my dear Aurelius, look up once more, and bless your children!"

"My children!" said the old man, gazing round with his dim eye from side to side—"my children! where are you, my boys? Aulus! Titus! Marcus! my dear gallant boys, where are you? Come close to my bedside, brave lads; let me feel your hands—touch me—touch me. Kiss me, my dear children, ere I go." He gazed a moment, and stretched forth his hand over the fountain. "Not one of you here, my children? not one?—no, not one! Quite alone. Why do you leave me thus to die quite alone? Jupiter—Jupiter, father of gods and men, what seest thou here? Is it seemly that an old man should be thus utterly deserted?" He paused again for some space, and then dropping his head, said, in a feeble whisper,—“Foolish, foolish old man, dost thou call upon the dead? Can the dead hear thee? They will hear and see thee both ere long.”

"My dear Aurelius," said Athanasia, "dream not so—look upon *us*, on *us*; we also are your children. God has made you our father; we love you as our father."

"God! ha!—what God?" said the old man; "what God do you speak of? I charge you not to speak to me of Jupiter; Jupiter is but a vision. Would you go worship stocks and stones, children, that ye have seen hewn by the hands of sinful men like yourselves? Will you fall down to the altar of a demon? Speak, children—I charge you renounce Jupiter. Jupiter, ay, Jupiter, with his thunderbolt, and Apollo too, and Mars, bloody Mars; they are all dreams—visions. What have I to do with your dreams?"

"We do, we do renounce them," said Athanasia;
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"your own hands have baptized us in the name of the Saviour. We are all Christians, dear father; we have no hope but in this faith."

"Faith! children—what is faith?" said the dying man; "I beseech you to tell me what is faith? Dark! dark. Oh, children, every thing is dark: to-day we crawl; to-morrow we die. Tell me, children, do you see any light before me? Poh! poh! 'tis but the moon. What is darkness? We know but the day and the night, and there may be other eyes than ours. My children!—I am faint—very faint; and yet all is dark—Alas! oh God! why thus utterly am I deserted?"

The old man dropped back heavily in the arms of Athanasia, and we hung over him for a moment, not doubting that the spirit had at length been released from its bondage. "He is dead!" said Sabinus; "he is dead utterly—why linger you here? let us fly—let us fly!" The old man opened his eyes, however, yet once again; and lifting himself up, displayed a countenance so calmly, so beautifully radiant, that he needed not to open his lips in order to satisfy us that peace, and hope, and faith had at last been vouchsafed to his bosom. "My dear children," said he, "the cloud hath passed away—I see—I see the brightness. My God deserts me not; my children, let me bless you ere I die—Where are your hands, my children? Give me your hand, Valerius; and yours—give me yours also, my sweet daughter—I place them together—Let no man part them;—whom God hath joined let not man put asunder. The blessing of God rest on you, my children—Close my old eyes ere you go—ere you go—"

He said so, and, with a gentle sigh, he breathed out his life in our arms. We closed the lids upon his eyes. We wrapped him all decently in his mantle; and Sabinus said nothing to restrain us, when we said we could not depart from the place without having laid the mortal relics of our friend in the tomb which he had prayed for in our hearing. Athanasia once again held the lamp, and I followed her, bearing the body in my arms, our feet guided by darker drops than had been aiding to us before, for all the way to the sepulchre of Thraso the ground was spotted with the blood of Aurelius.

The wounded soldier was lying in the grasp of death, and over-against him sat the enchantress Pona, singing to herself one of her old charmed songs, which she interrupted not even when we reached the place where she was sitting. We lifted the flat stone from off the grave of the martyr, and throwing up the loose sand with my sword, I committed the corpse of the holy man to the embrace of earth. I replaced the stone, and led away the weeping Athanasia.

We retraced once more our steps, hearing, for a long while after we had left the sepulchre, the song of the hideous witch singing alone amid the darkness. Once again we breathed the air of heaven; I dipped my hands into the fountain, lest Sabinus should observe unnecessarily the bloody stains; I returned my sword into its scabbard, and prepared to obey at length the earnest entreaties of the centurion.

As we came forth from the thicket, within whose circuit all these things had occurred, we heard the neighing of a horse, and I was at first inclined to hasten the more the steps of our flight. But Sabinus insisted on our waiting for a moment, and walked aside towards the point from which the sound proceeded. When he came back, he was leading in his hand two horses fully caparisoned; "We must not stand upon trifles," said he; "we must make free to mount." I placed Athanasia on one of them, and vaulted on behind her. Sabinus mounted the other, and dashing into a rapid pace, we soon drew near, without having met with any interruption, to the Ostian Gate; for by that, the centurion said, we should most easily strike into the right path to the Valerian villa, where all our friends were expecting us.

The soldiers who were on guard at the gate challenged us cheerily as we came up to them.

"The word, comrades?"

"*Titus!*" quoth the centurion.

"Pass on—whom bear you with you, comrades?"

"A Christian—a Christian prisoner," said I.

"By Jove, that's worth gold to you, brother," quoth the guard.—"Open the gate there;—pass on, friends,—and may a curse go with your burden,—I hope I shall have luck one day myself."

The Ostian Gate closed behind us, and we proceeded at a fiery pace westward, till all the light of the suburbs was left in our rear.

CHAPTER XIX.

WE rode in silence thus swiftly till we had advanced, it may be, four or five miles on the road towards Ostium.

It was then that, on gaining the brow of an eminence more considerable than any we had yet come to, we halted for a moment, as if instinctively. On looking backward we could still discover, by the now clear and perfect moonlight, the mighty masses of the Eternal City rising black against the horizon, high above all the intervening expanse of gardens and groves. I paused, to regard for the last time the gigantic outline, and heard, borne soft and sweet through the serene air, the far off melancholy voice of the horn, announcing to the Prætorians the changing of the watch. The martial music of the villages around responded in succession to the note sounded from the Capitol. And then again all was silence, save the night-breeze sighing among the poplars with which our path was skirted.

"Farewell to Rome!" whispered Athanasia; "my heart tells me, Caius, that we have had our last look of the city."

I pressed the maiden to my bosom, and we continued our course down the hill, and were soon buried among the darkness of my paternal woods.

"Perhaps you are not aware," said the centurion, who by this time had quite recovered himself, "that we are now riding through your own domain. Many a time, Valerius, have I hunted for birds' nests, when I was a boy, among these fine oak woods; little did I think then that I should ever visit their shades under such circumstances as these. But, upon my word, there

seems to be a great deal of very valuable timber here : I think you ought to give orders about thinning the clumps, and they would have plenty of time to grow again before your return."

"Indeed I think they would," said I ; "but, in the mean time, I shall spare them—I would not have the old groves lament over my succession."

"What a British notion !" quoth Sabinus ; "by Jove, I think you have still some tincture of your maternal druidism about you ; but stop—Ha ! yonder is really a sight of splendour !"

He pointed through an opening among the thick trees on the right-hand, and we perceived, indeed, at some distance below us by the river-side, innumerable symptoms of magnificent festivity. The great arcades of the villa were blazing from end to end with lamps and torches, displaying in distinctness that almost rivalled that of noonday every gilded cupola and sculptured porch, and all the long lines of marble columns that sustained the proud fabric of the Valerian mansion.

In front of the main portico, and all along the broad steps of its ascent, stood crowds of people, as if in expectation. Before them, girls and boys, all clad in white raiment, were dancing on the lawn to the sound of a joyful tabour. A confused hum of gladness ascended from every part of the illuminated pile. "Come, my boy, push on cheerily," quoth the centurion ; "if you don't, you may chance after all to be too late for the great moment. The procession, it is evident, can be but a little way before us—and I, Valerius," he added in a whisper, "must not lose the benefit of the rehearsal."

At the gateway, which opened a little farther on into the gardens, we found the two faithful freedmen Boto and Dromo, waiting for us with horses richly caparisoned (for they knew not how we might travel from the city), and with change of dress for the whole of us. We passed under the porch of a small rural chapel that stood near the gate, and there Sabinus and I exchanged our military attire for the peaceful gown, in which alone we could with propriety appear in the nuptial

celebration. Athanasia, for her part, threw over all her dress a long veil of white, for she alone durst not show her face in the precincts, where of right she was mistress. We then mounted the new steeds that had been prepared for us, and dashing through the grove that edged the lawn, joined the bridal procession just at the moment when it had come in front of the villa—and all the merry clamour of shouting, and all the bursting melody of lutes and cymbals, saluted the first appearance of the curtained litter in which the young Sempornia was borne in the midst of her attendant pomp of horsemen and chariots.

Conspicuous in front of all rode, in his lofty car, the Flamen of Jupiter, arrayed in his long purple robe, and wearing on his head the consecrated diadem. The priestess of Apollo, too, was there, surrounded with all her damsels, ruling, or seeming to rule, with her own hand, the milk-white horses of the sun that pawed the ground before her burnished wheels. Gay horsemen checked their steeds amid the blaze of torches and the peals of music. White-robed damsels and youths, advancing from the portal, chanted the Hymenæan. Far and wide, nuts and rose-buds were scattered among the torch-bearing throng. Young Sextus leaped from his horse, and the litter touched the ground; and the bride, wrapped all over in her saffron-coloured veil, was lifted, gently struggling, over the anointed threshold. Sabinus swelled the hymeneal chorus with his ever-cheerful voice; while poor Athanasia—my own unsaluted bride—she stood apart from all the clamour, gazing through her veil—it may be through her tears—upon the festal pageant.

We ventured not into the blazing hall till all the rest had entered it. The symbolic fleece had already been shorn from the spotless lamb, and all were preparing to pass into the chambers beyond, where the tables appeared already covered with the wedding-feast. Every one was glad, and every one was busy; and no one regarded us as we stood beneath the pillars of the hall, contemplating the venerable images of my ancestors, that were arranged all around us—from the mouldered bust

of the great Publicola, down to the last of the lineage, the princely Cneius, whose inheritance was and was not mine. There were moments, I cannot conceal it, in which some feelings of regret were mingled with the admiration, which I could not refuse to the spectacle of all the ancient grandeur that for the first, and for the last time, I was gazing on. But Athanasia leaned upon me as I stood there, and all things seemed well, when I felt the pressure of her bosom.

Ere long, Dromo approached us, and led us aside from the scene of all the noisy merriment into an upper chamber, where, divested of her veil, the lovely bride of Sextus stood waiting to fold Athanasia in one parting embrace to her bosom. I turned aside, and witnessed not their farewell tears.

Licinius, Lucius, Velius, and the priestess came into the bridal-chamber, with the wreathed cup. It was then that, in their presence, I proclaimed Athanasia for my bride. They kissed her pale cheek—once and again she returned the salute—and with slow steps we took our departure. Sabinus, the good Sabinus, walked along with us down the dark alley that led to the river-side. The two freedmen were already sitting at their oars—we bade adieu to the centurion—tenderly the kind man bade us both adieu—and I lifted my Athanasia, weeping natural tears, devoid of bitterness, into the little boat which had been prepared for us.

Boto began, as we pushed off from the shore, to chant an old British boat-song of his, which I had heard a thousand times without thinking any thing about it, but which now, I know not how, seemed to me to breathe the very spirit of pensiveness and repose. Athanasia, wrapped in her long cloak, leaned herself like a bride upon my bosom, and I looked back upon the illuminated mansion, and thought almost that there was something of distastefulness in the mirthful strains that still echoed from its dome. Slowly the measured oars divided the dark waters; and gladder hearts have been floated upon the calm breast of Tiber—but none calmer, none happier than ours.

“Dear Boto,” said I, “methinks that is a fine old song

of yours ; yet you know that I have brought a bride with me to-night, and surely you choose a very melancholy strain."

"My dear master," he replied, "I thought not my dear lady would take any notice of my song ; but 'tis one that the Salurian boatmen sing whenever they are on the water at the midnight. It was made, they say, by one of their old chiefs, as they rowed him away one night over the sea to Mona, after all his kindred had been slain, and his village burned in the woods by the Romans ; and it seemed to me, my dear master, that we, too, were now rowing away from them, for they are as cruel now as they were in the old time. Pardon me for what I say, but you were always with us, my dear master, from your childhood ; and your mother is one of our own race, and I cannot help thinking of you as one of ourselves."

"My dear Boto," said I, "sing on, if it please you, and I will tell your lady what I can of the meaning of your song."

He obeyed, and resumed his mournful strain—the same which, I dare say, you have heard him sing when he was old.

"The night is dark above the water,
The hills are all behind us far ;
We cannot see the hill of slaughter,
Where in their tents the steel-clad Romans are.

Row gently through the gentle sea—
Row gently, for my wound is deep—
Soon, soon in safety shall ye be—
And I, too, brothers,—for I fain would sleep,

Our own old oaks stand scathed by fires,
Around the roofs for which we bled ;
The bones of our unconquered sires
Stir in their cairns—for sorrow moves the dead.

Row gently, for my wound is deep,
And sadness fills my weary eyes—
Row gently, for I fain would sleep—
I fain would sleep, and never more arise."

So glided we down the deep calm stream of Tiber.

At the place upon which we had fixed in the morning we were hailed from the shore by Silo, and, having taken him in, received the welcome intelligence that he had secured for our use a very light and convenient bark, the master of which had intended sailing in the course of the day that was just over for New Carthage, but had willingly delayed for a few hours, in order that he might not lose the gain of carrying us along with him. "From that part of Spain," said Silo, "there can be no difficulty in procuring some vessel bound for our native island. My little daughter is already on board, under the keeping of the master. All at Ostium is sleep and silence, and the tide flows fair over the sand; so we shall be, ere day-break, far out upon our course."

We found the vessel, such as he had described her, lying somewhat apart from the multitude of galleys that throng at all periods the great seaport of the capital. The zealous Dromo, not without much emotion, there parted from us, and, laden with gifts, not of form, but of thankfulness, began to row himself alone up the river, back to the villa, at which I understood his habitation was now to be fixed.

"Farewell, my kind master," he said, as he was about to push off his shallop from under the side of the vessel; "farewell, my kind Master Valerius, may all the gods, wherever and whatever they be, grant you smooth water and fair wind; and may both you and my fair lady—not forgetting my good friend Boto, whose education I can scarcely be said to have begun—soon, very soon come back to us, in times when ye shall have no need to look upon your own house lighted up for the feasts of others, nor to be rowed away down Tiber by midnight, and carried back to that island, which, for all that you say of it, is, I suspect, a cold miserable place, saving your presence, in comparison of my native Crete. Farewell! sweet winds blow upon you. Have you no last message for any of your friends that you are leaving behind you?"

"Give my love to them all," I replied,—“your master Sextus—”

"My patron Sextus!" quoth the new freedman, correcting me.

"Your pardon, Dromo—your patron Sextus, and your old patron his father, and your young lady, for I am sure you will allow me to call her so; and last of all, the next time you see him, to your good friend and mine the centurion."

"I will, I will," quoth the Cretan; "and since you have said it, sir, I believe he has as much reason to think me his friend as any man in Rome, slave though I was, and poor freedman as I am ever like to be. I will tell you when we meet next some pretty stories; and long, long before that day comes, Sabinus, let me tell you, will be lord, as he well deserves to be, of one of the prettiest ladies, and one of the prettiest houses, too, that can be found this night within the four walls of the city you have quitted. But I dare say he told you all—did he tell you before you parted about his wedding? Heaven bless me! first and last, what a job that pretty widow has been to me! But no matter, 'tis all well now—Sextus has in his arms all that he desired to have; and Sabinus, I think, is at least good enough for the lady he is to have in a day or two. Although, after all, to speak truth, I don't know why she should be ill-spoken of for any thing that has passed. She followed her fancy, and who can blame her for doing so? But as for Xerophrastes, I confess I am glad Master Longbeard has taken to the Tub at last. Oh! how it will tickle my bones to stand by when I fall in with him, and hear him declaiming after his new fashion. I shall buy a bunch of green grapes that day, were I to pay their weight in brass for them, just that I may have the pleasure of sticking them up on the wall, right before the face of the old fox."

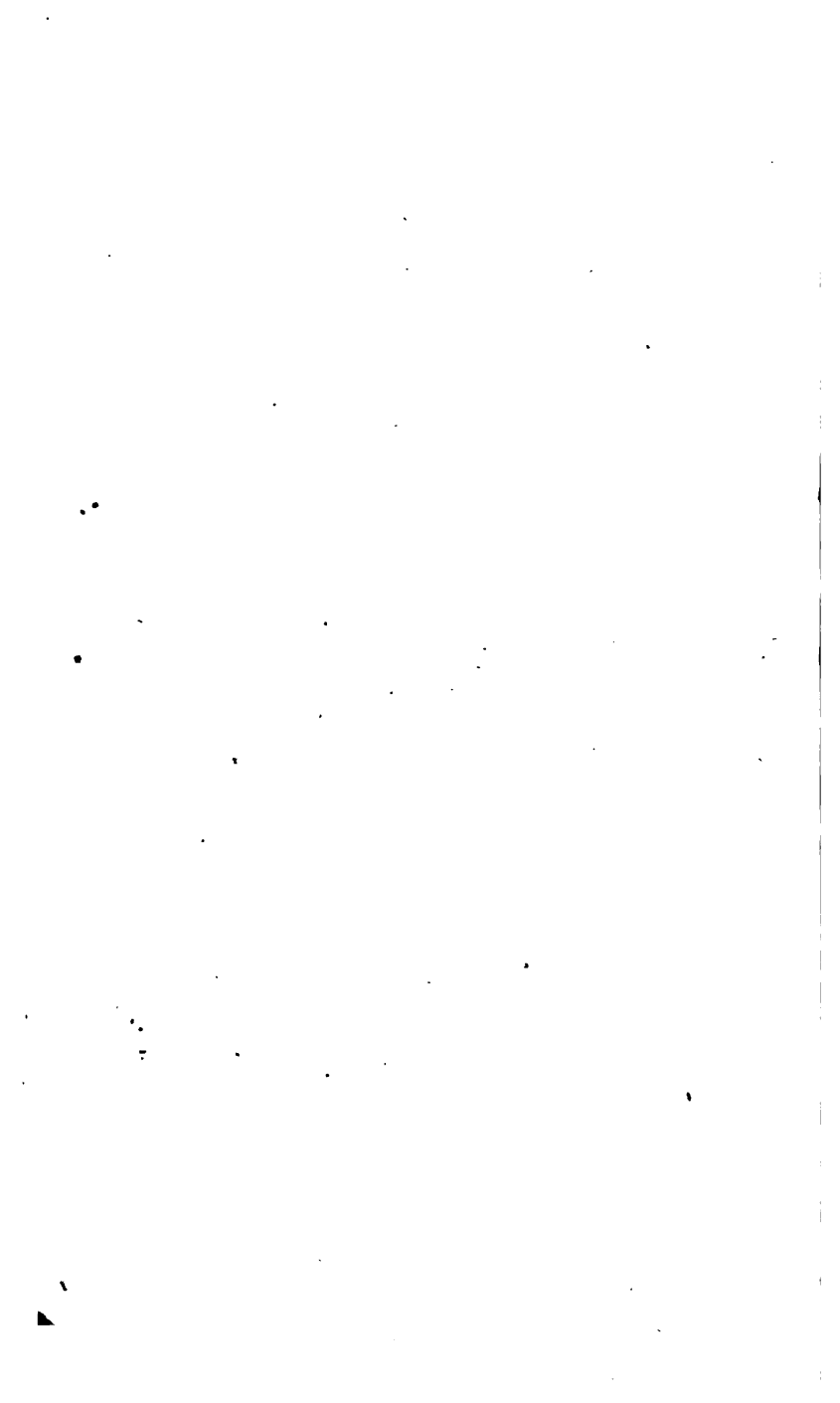
"Good-by, Dromo; you are still the same man, I perceive. Good-by—commend me to all—and commend me, in all reverence, to Xerophrastes, too, when you encounter him."

"Good-by, once more, master," cried the gay Cretan, and pushed off with all his vigour. We loosed our

hawsers a moment after, and stretched our sails before a breeze as favourable as he had been wishing us.

An awning had been erected on the stern by the providence of the jailer. Thither Athanasia and I now retired, while the mariners plied their strength, and Silo and Boto went to sleep upon the deck. But gladly did we hail the open sea, when our bark emerged upon its surface; gladly did we peep forth to see the clear deep shining below us like a second dark blue firmament, so truly was it giving back the reflection of the innumerable stars that shone in the serene sky overhead. The bark skimmed the calm surface of the waters like a sea-bird. The sailors whistled joyously to the prospering gale.

The sun was riding high in the heavens when we looked forth on the morrow; air and sea were sleeping all around beneath the fervid glow of the day-star, and far, far eastward, the blue shores of Italy lay behind us like the shadows of a dream.



APPENDIX.

[Although the two following Letters are well known both to classical scholars and to the readers of works on Church History, yet it has been thought that they might be added in this place without impropriety. The preceding pages may happen to be perused by persons who have never seen any of the collections in which these letters are to be found ; and they afford by far the best and most authentic illustration, both of the manner in which the subject of Christianity was regarded by the polite Romans of the day of Trajan, and of the principles upon which that prince regulated his conduct in regard to the adherents to the new faith.]

PLINY TO TRAJAN.*

IT is a rule, sir, which I inviolably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts ; for who is more capable of removing my scruple, or informing my ignorance ? Having never been present at any trials concerning those who profess Christianity, I am unacquainted, not only with the nature of their crimes, or the measure of their punishment, but how far it is proper to enter into an examination concerning them. Whether, therefore, any difference is usually made with respect to the ages of the guilty, or no distinction is to be observed between the young and the adult ; whether repentance entitles them to a pardon, or, if a man has been once a Christian, it avails nothing to desist from his error ; whether the very profession of Chris-

* Book X. Letter 97.

tianity, unattended with any criminal act, or only the crimes themselves inherent in the profession, are punishable; in all these points I am greatly doubtful. In the mean while, the method I have observed towards those who have been brought before me as Christians is this:—I interrogated them whether they were Christians—if they confessed, I repeated the question twice, adding threats at the same time; and if they still persevered, I ordered them to be immediately punished: for I was persuaded, whatever the nature of their opinions might be, a contumacious and inflexible obstinacy certainly deserved correction. There were others also brought before me possessed with the same infatuation; but, being citizens of Rome, I directed that they should be carried thither. But this crime spreading (as is usually the case) while it was actually under prosecution, several instances of the same nature occurred. An information was presented to me, without any name subscribed, containing a charge against several persons; these, upon examination, denied they were, or ever had been, Christians. They repeated, after me, an invocation to the gods, and offered religious rites, with wine and frankincense, before your statue (which, for that purpose, I had ordered to be brought, together with those of the gods), and even reviled the name of Christ; whereas there is no forcing, it is said, those who are really Christians into any of these compliances. I thought it proper, therefore, to discharge them. Some, among those who were accused by a witness in person, at first confessed themselves Christians, but immediately after denied it; the rest owned, indeed, they had been of that number formerly, but had now (some above three, others more, and a few above twenty years ago) renounced that error. They all worshipped your statue, and the images of the gods, uttering imprecations at the same time against the name of Christ. They affirmed the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they met on a certain stated day before it was light, and addressed themselves in a form of prayer to Christ, as to some god, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery; never to falsify their word,

nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up. After which, it was their custom to separate, and then re-assemble, to eat in common a harmless meal. From this custom, however, they desisted after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your commands, I forbade the meeting of any assemblies. In consequence of this their declaration, I judged it the more necessary to endeavour to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to officiate in their religious functions ; but all I could discover was, that these people were actuated by an absurd and excessive superstition. I deemed it expedient, therefore, to adjourn all further proceedings, in order to consult you. For it appears to be a matter highly deserving your consideration ; more especially as great numbers must be involved in the danger of these prosecutions, which have already extended, and are still likely to extend, to persons of all ranks and ages, and even of both sexes. In fact, this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread its infection among the neighbouring villages and country. Nevertheless, it still seems possible to restrain its progress. The temples, at least, which were once almost deserted, begin now to be frequented ; and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived ; to which I must add, there is again also a general demand for the victims, which for some time past had met with but few purchasers. From the circumstances I have mentioned, it is easy to conjecture what numbers might be reclaimed, if a general pardon were granted to those who shall repent of their error.

TRAJAN TO PLINY.*

The method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in the proceedings against those Christians which were brought before you, is extremely proper ; as it is not possible to lay down any fixed rule by which to act in all cases of this nature. But I would not have you *officiously* enter into

* Book X. Letter 98.

any inquiries concerning them. If, indeed, they should be brought before you, and the crime should be proved, they must be punished ; with this restriction, however, that where the party denies he is a Christian, and shall make it evident that he is not, by invoking our gods, let him (notwithstanding any former suspicion) be pardoned upon his repentance. Informations without the accuser's name subscribed ought not to be received in prosecutions of any sort ; as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the equity of my government.

THE END.

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